

MANASTASH

VOLUME 31: SPRING 2021 | TRUTH TO POWER





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Editor's Note

Dear Manastash Readers,

In this 31st edition of the Manastash journal, we reflect on the historical moments of the last year, highlight individual truths that unite us, and focus on the differences that make us who we are. These truths heal our past and strengthen our future. Join us in sharing these experiences and lifting our voices as we speak our truth.

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Genes and Swing Sets

Emily Lyon

My hands are not creatures
of destruction and ruin
trampling through my beauty.
They are roots blooming
peony blossoms of every color.

My breath is not an undesired
gene poisoning from the inside:
who I am endangering what I've built.
It is spring rays after winter winds
warming my cheeks and knuckles.

My eyes are not pearly venomous
fangs; beautiful at a glance, deadly
when trusted. They are loving,
careful hugs enveloping me in a
stare that I had forgotten.

My arms are not vines strangling
nutrients from my radiance. They are
the ropes of my childhood swing set
behind the church, holding me up to
the sky of an early Sunday morning.

My heart is not the dark alleys in
the city where evil prowls and sin is
gleeful. It is song and melody from a
choir that lifts spirits and exalts God.
One day I will believe it.

Tree Among Buildings

Sophia Smith



blaze

Elaina Watts

i was a forest fire, first,
one ecosystem in
 one day
trees trembling as i came
i blazed bright
 blazed alive
lava veins
shining eyes
burn quick
 never die
then—
 no

embers
to choke.
 no
dark
plumes
of smoke.
 just
gray
pieces
to stoke.
 but--

lately, baby, i'm a slow burn

sparks scratching at the back of my
skullbone, live coals scorching through my
brain cells, an inferno now from my scalp to my
tiptoes, i'm a sputtering flame turned raging
blaze, get out of my way, i'm
 coming

That Boy is a Gun...

Champagne Ryder

I have a friend named Aaron, his greatest passion is anything gun --
Aaron talks about all the benefits and safety precautions.

Keep the gun locked - knowing when to lock a jaw,
keep the gun ready but finger off the trigger -- voice ready in your chest.

Stewing, looking to boil over beyond the barrel of a gun.
Pointing forward, the bullet waits for the hitting of a hammer.

Telling it when to go like a soldier awaiting orders from a general.
The most important thing to have (you, the reader) is the courage to use your
gun.

When I went to the convention for motivational speakers, a speaker told my
group.

Our greatest weapon is our voice, so be careful how we use it because it is
powerful.

People who know me can hear me in a crowded building just by a single *gasp.
It's my moniker.

My signature, revenge of the nerd laugh.
Some people say it sounds like I have asthma.

Sounds like someone is dying.
Sounds like a seal... with asthma.

I know my voice is a weapon.
Notice what was said earlier, every instance of gun can be replaced by voice.

Because so many of my brothers were killed when they used their voice.
And someone mistook it as a gun.

So many of my brothers don't make a sound,
because people want to think their skin is already so loud.

So dangerous.
It should be concealed like a pistol.

When I look in the mirror,
when I see my skin, I notice my privilege.

Is light skin,
a veil that allows me to slip under the radar.

So, I'm still black.
But light enough where my skin is a whisper.

That's why I don't conceal my voice.
That's why I write so unapologetically.

I am unafraid, because I know so many of my brothers who died unafraid.
I've used this voice as a warning.

To send back enemies.
Used this voice to say all the right things at the wrong times.

Used this voice to talk myself in and out of trouble.
Used this voice on behalf of some of my brothers.

Because they're scared to make their voice heard.
Because some want to see their beautiful melanin skin as a cacophony.

And it never mattered who was right and wrong in that situation,
because my brother's voice was right, but his skin made him guilty.

His skin being the only black mark on his record.
His skin contrasting what is white, I mean right.

So, he was then punished to death long before he ever saw a jury.
The verdict branded on him before he stepped foot in a courtroom.

And the story was never revealed, because history is written in the eyes of the
victors.

I mean survivors, because what is history, but a fable agreed upon?

The media knows a dead man can tell no tales.
So, they tell different narratives from their twisted mouths.

Till' it didn't matter my family's name.
Just as long as they were hanging from the poplar trees.

Posed as a martyr.
Put on a cross as the reason we march.

But arms crossed, because the police will say they're a gangbanger.
Doesn't deserve to live, because of the neighborhood he grew up in.

The voice no longer defends, because they already have the pound of flesh to attempt.

To pay for sins he never did.

That's why I'll say your name.

Scream your story.

Whisper your love song.

For I promise, to make sure you live forever in these poems.

Till' my last breath.

My last *Gasp.

Cuz all Eric Garner was doing was pedaling cigarettes.

Just to feed his kids.

*Gasp

Cuz mama, Trayvon Martin was wearing a hoodie just so he didn't catch a cold.

But it didn't stop him from catching bullets.

*Gasp

Mama, Tamir Rice was just playing in the park,

because he was told to never grow up too fast.

*Gasp

Mama, please help me.

*Gasp

Mama, you gave me my voice.

*Gasp

Dad, you taught me how to use it like a gun

*Gasp

But just because you have it.

Will you have the courage to use it when the time comes?

Dressed Up

Autumn Smith

Scent of freshly cut lawns
Seeps through cracked windows
Mechanical humming
Piercing through course fabric

Seeps through cracked windows
Sour hard candy plums
Piercing through course fabric
Soft felt pulled over my face

Sour hard candy plums
Chalk melts across my tongue
Soft felt pulled over my face
Dressed up for somewhere to go

Chalk melts across my tongue
Glaring, harsh light flashing
Dressed up for somewhere to go
Car keys sit cold

Hair

Caelyn White

My friends drive to Wenatchee,
to cut hair and get piercings and to change,
and I go with them
to watch.

From the back seat, explaining, I can't afford to change.
I don't tell the truth and I don't lie;
it is both my
pockets and bravery that are lacking.

Old pictures are identical
to mirrors. Others reassure me; your eyes
deceive you. There is movement you can
never quite identify.

Opportunity for change presents itself
and I think and I think and I think
until the chance falls away, once so solid, trickling water.
There is another time, I guess.

Four years ago, the thought crept in.
Cut it away, gain that levity you envy.
One "I'd rather you didn't," and then I never did,
years after he was gone.

Why should my body be for me? Is it not for viewing?
The aesthetic I reach for, for smiles, so pretty, so leave
my hair,
the lasting example of femininity pulsing in my veins.

Who am I? Have I lost her? Is this it?
My friends driving to Wenatchee to cut hair
and me, watching from waiting rooms,
never changing?

Untitled

Aster Knudson



Broken Woman

Shelby Davis

Based on The Broken Column by Frida Kahlo

Suck in your gut.
Address your elders as such.
Do not speak unless spoken to.

Line after line,
they pierce my skin.
Pricks with no blood.
Unseen to the naked eye.
I can no longer stand tall,
my spine flawed from weight
placed on me since birth.
I am no longer capable
of supporting their
forlorn dreams.
The tears
fall.

Proper women do not cry.
Another nail drives home.

Heaven's Joke

Zach Schloss

“When you die, there’s no more bloated gut,” I told her. Mine had blown up so full that I spewed death out my crack. Dark, purple, fleshy things. But my stomach flattened as I floated to the Kingdom of vermilion prairies and tingly brooks and too many damn animals that wanted their heads scratched. Couldn’t say “damn” with my granddaughter, Cayenne. When I materialize in her little dreams, my tongue won’t say certain things. Heaven-locked. Most words I say come out different. You get used to it. I explain to her that when you pass on, there’s a high-speed kaleidoscope in the brain. “Life flashing” kind-of moment but a twisting bundle of last-millisecond ideas that make you scream, “Why the [heaven] did I not think of that [blessed] thing before? I could’ve been fanning my face with Ben Franklins!” It’s the final joke of life, the revelation that you had your nuclear idea nested somewhere in your neurons. They’re locked up, waiting to mock you while you explode your soul into the toilet bowl. Cayenne and I were trotting along on her flimsy dream ponies, mine wheezing under the weight of my rotund rusty dusty, when she asked, “What was yours?” “[Crud],” I said, “I didn’t think of passing it on! Well first, it starts with [UNAUTHORIZED].”

Ferocious Bones

Marie Marchand

life and I wrestle leaning sore limbs
over a damning sea I resist with
tigerish zeal ferocious bones

mortality settles in the shadowy inlets
of my physiognomy distorting features
in a haze of unknowing

rills erode my forehead every worry
and rumination a parched crow
reposed in the crease of my glabella

zinc curls my tongue as briny fog
seizes light dissolving figures
into lonesome ghosts

my hold slackens relinquishing the line
I yield my prayerful bones when
will this ever be enough?

Target Tantrum

Jamie Wyatt

I'm afraid I've embarrassed you--and us, again. Those tsunami waves of emotion have used me as a vehicle and driven me right into the side of a city, again, I'm afraid. I wasn't invited to your shotgun wedding because you are humiliated. It is the third. I did attend the second, in a room overlooking the Puget Sound. I forgot to tell you not to be shamed by your first two marriages' demise. The first one poisoned after trusted lover spent his weekend buried in another. While we buried your mother in the cemetery on the hill. The second after the Navy, Guantanamo tainted the marriage like a stain, spreading like an inkblot--unable to fathom what is inevitably lost. Maybe you didn't tell me of the third marriage because this partner is incompatible. Despite your heart, infected with gigantism, he is blind of your truths and merits; focusing on the shiny, Barbie pink package with platinum blonde ribbon.

The image of you holding your mother's hand in her hospital bed haunts me, the skin wrinkled by the tape. The IV tube hanging from her weak hand. Your acrylic nails, this week--a nursery room pink--fold over her hand like protective claws. The picture haunts me. A similar snapshot: one of my tiny, child-like carnival hands holding your massive, elegant hand with long, graceful fingers interwoven with my short, stubby ones--complete with chipped black polish. Only a reversal--the IV is in your hand and the tape is wrinkling your recently untanned skin, yearning for the warmth of sunlight denied by the static white hospital room.

This is why, I'm hoping, you will forgive my poor, tortured heart for my very public tantrum--appropriately sized for my thirty-four years, when I ran into the third husband. My mind is occupied by cloned soldiers of you, his intrusion is like fire in the veins. The unsuspecting woman beside him, flipping her voluminous healthy raven hair over her shoulder, while your peach head is blanketed with soft pale fuzz. Three small children: two inside the metal basket and one gripping it for dear life accompany them--children you will never be able to mother. He saunters beside them without seeming to care, while his wife dies in a hospital. A war cry sounds inside my skull. I become storm, hurricane; fists flying, veins popping, forcing all pairs of eyes on Aisles 4, 5, and 6 to turn and absorb my Irish temper detonate. I tell the unsuspecting woman not to rely on you to provide for her and her children if she ever gets cancer. Her eyes are wild like an animal trapped in a deadfall. You will not help her up, you will kick her beaten body, kick her beaten body. You will feed it like a monster. I expect the storm inside me to dissipate, to calm, but it never does.

Plum Blossoms in the Sunlight

Maya Herbert



Faded Shades

Jay L. R.

Colors swirl around in my cabinet.
I choose whichever one I feel like being.
Monday is red. Perhaps it is because
of the stamp on yesterday's mail. A bright
cherry red, a dirty white envelope,
a dried rose, a wilting. It reminds me
of my beating heart. Although, I think the
heart is more of a brown red. A thudding
on the burgundy walls. Life in the frames,
a life. Shove it in the dark blue corners.
Digging in my brain for a scent of-
Mail doesn't come on Sunday's.
Remembering, or trying to. A
beating heart, a stamp, an ugly man's
tongue, a hiding place. A soft shade of
red-
really just pink.

X

B. Bilby Garton

I lost my first wrestling match when I was 14. To be fair, I hadn't been to any practices. I'm still not sure when I signed up. But I must have. Grappling is never by accident.

There's no tie in wrestling, you know. Somebody wins and somebody loses—either by points or by position. That's how I lost—by position. I tried to quit, but words don't count in wrestling. So, I made x's with my legs.

It was probably kind of confusing. I mean, an x in baseball is way different from an x in bowling. And x stands for kiss and buried treasure. Then again you can put an x on anything and it pretty much means “don't.” I guess he was an optimist.

Oh well. I'm just glad the winner is the only one who gets a prize. It was two months before I was certain there wouldn't be a prize for second place.

Sunken Home

Emily Lyon

The panels on the outside of the house curl
inward on themselves like leather in a fire.

The mobile home has been here in this spot
for longer than I have been alive.

The Scotts have called it home for as long
as it has sunk here. The ground swallows it

on one side, as if it may one day point to the sky
like the Titanic devoured by frozen water.

The shingles were torn away by a windstorm
months ago, swept up with the promise

of elsewhere, out of this town encased in dust.
The tarp held by roof nails takes up

the job like an eldest daughter, keeps
the rain out of the bucket on the kitchen floor.

But the man in the house is worse
than any storm or rotting insulation.

He could fix the roof or build an island, but
I learned how not to be treated by men like him:

why not to find a wall at my back
and an elbow at my collar bones.

With her body, my mother taught me
what not to do, in this vertical ship.

With her clothes and my homework
strewn across the driveway, tossed

over the neighbor's fence in his rage.
But when the man was gone,

the fences were protection, and the
freezing water enveloping us was a duvet.

I've Been Listening to the Man Beside Me

Aubrey Higdon

after Kim Addonizio

his breath so deep—I wonder if he hears
the ticking clock above the rumble of
his throat, the air so smooth against his ears—
so deep, I think he'd miss the flapping dove
inside my chest—each tap of beak on rib.
At times, I breathe umbrellas: open up
the canopies, become a baby's crib
and let my sound be held within the cup
I call my lungs: so hollow, empty, still—
the man inhales, and I can't hear my heart.
Just once, I'll have to let my own noise fill
the room with breath so loud it falls apart;
so loud, that birds take flight, that curtains tear,
so loud that babies laugh, and people stare.

Plastic People

Courtney Tipton

Every day comes
wrapped in a
plastic package,
the waste
we see: rainbow confetti
on roads,
in sand,
through screens.

With each package
melted and molded
bundles of
photochemical smog
smudge our sky
shrinking, choking,
burning alive.

Yet we're entitled
to packages, to mass
consumption.

We swim
through white bones,
dead reef.

Why can't we
take what we want
without consequence?

Why did we think that we could?

These straws
we "need" to sip,
happy hour
Mai Tais are tossed away,
sturdy cylindrical shape:
the perfect weapon
on marine brains.

These six-pack rings
hold beer
so conveniently,

but a bird's
beer belly
is its swallowed remains.

Is there a boundary
between a flashlight
in a green turtle's eyes
as she sleeps,
and a flashlight in your own?

Look, everyone!
I've experienced nature!
to the edge
of my smartphone lens,

All the while
one
with the world
we live in.

Consumed

Aubrey Higdon

Sometimes I look in the mirror, and all I see are bones: ivory and
 dead, hushed and fixed with no pedestal. I watch them
 move, as if breathing: young and gaunt.

Then I wonder if it was God who ate me, or the moon.

Heart of the Ocean

Rebekah Pusateri

The moon was laughing when I followed the puddles of daylight fading on the sand,
straight into the rich, dark velvety folds of waves crashing into each other like curtains.
It lured me in with promises: come closer, *we will alleviate, amend, and abate.*
Scales clouding
my eyes, I touched the foam that curled around my frozen ankles, chilled with mystery. The
moon pierced through a crease with its first beam, glorious, so I could carefully pull back the
wave and be welcomed whole, delirious with relief as the world disappeared, replaced
with the pulsing heart of the ocean, dragging me away. The scales peeled off in flakes,
illuminating the oily tentacles wrapped around my waist in a rush to deposit me on the ocean
floor. I opened my mouth, but the hiss of the sea gagged my throat, leaving me with one last
glance of the moon's smirk.

Untitled

Aster Knudson



She Says: “You’re Too Skinny Again”

Tami Jensen

What does it mean
to be too skinny? To only bear the weight
of marrow, my bones like sawdust under a window?
We hang tinsel on a fresh balsam fir.
On the other side of the neighbor’s wall a cat howls.
My throat is a tangled nest of Christmas lights.
What is too skinny but a scale tipped backward
or an hourglass cracked in half?
Our kitchen doesn’t feed me
so I hang stockings from nails above our fireplace.
I tongue my lip’s tender frenulum
& throw up acid in the shower.
At night, my neck pulse flutters against the pillow.

Devourer

Jamie Wyatt

I peeked, I saw,
I saw you devour
The poetic lines of sad prose
I write for you.
You-devour-them-like-a-binge-eater-in-the-kitchen-at-midnight

You-devour-them-with-the-desperation-I-had-when-I-begged-him-to-stay
You-devour-them-like-the-time-I-argued-with-passion-and-intensity-about-
gay-rights-and-you-were-so-lost

You devour the stanzas
Like the ocean of sorrow
I carry.

Remember when you removed the serrated dagger?
Embedded so deep, into the static white bone,
We thought I might bleed to death.

Numbed by rum and candlelight,
You threaded and stitched me together;
Expert tailor
Now your death has unraveled the mess of me.

Birthwaters

Tami Jensen

I trace his hair in circles, the fontanelle still oiled from birth,
still covered in the sweet smell of amniotic water.
I'm reminded of star anise boiling on the stove.

My son's cheeks are two ripe peaches, plump as he gums my areola.
His lips flay open like a fish.
Sometimes he flops in my arms, a shored trout.
His new hands can't yet make cups, so he fists the moon of my breast
between two pink palms in his sleep.

My image in the mirror across the room looks like my sister's,
twins but not twins,
separated by years and 300 miles of desert.
I try not to count the blue yucca between us when she gives birth
to her fourth child in a tub,

delivers her and the placenta under a barred window.
Streetlight flickers across two lonely beings bathed in blood
and water. My sister holds her daughter between splayed knees,
unwinds the cord three times as it pulses from blue to yellow

in her fingers. My niece wails, her mother memorizes:
a small brown face as it disappears in lukewarm water.
The baby flutters against her hands, a small salmon beating itself
against a rock. Behind them a door jamb splinters open.

Flower Dress on My Brown Skin

Karla Maravilla

Hard knuckles, tight skin on an en-
closed fist,
walk down bare sidewalk this
winter morning.

Brush of fog, thin like rain in the cotton grove,
basketball shoes hang from the powerlines.

Dove crooning at church
windows with open curtains
above jawbreaker.

Sharp canines, the splat-
ter of cranberries,
sleek
grease on fresh cement, cotton-
ball feathers at the church podium.

Drift dandelion fluff
fall down like cracked egg shells

underneath my fingernail sticky inside

coconut milk drips
neck in the mush-
room garden
of calcium decay, hiding behind a bush.
Tiny curves rise to

bumps on the spine,

tangled against the church
windows
with
open
curtains,
running
down
rising
streets
to the dead american yard.

At home, the cat curls in the inside of a coconut
in the lap of mother's dress.

Broken toenail, nose dripping, eye swelling.
Mama crying on the cliffside of the couch.

Hyacinth Close Up

Maya Herbert



Pet Store

Emily Lyon

When I go to the pet store, I look for your car. You named her Captain Phasma. On the way home from Clear Lake, your boyfriend hit black ice and then the snowbank and then the guard rail. In the early morning hours of a February Sunday, a truck pulled Captain Phasma away from the edge. The passenger breaks were left warped. When you got back into town, you drove to the pet store anyway. The tiny dent on the passenger side bumper was smaller in diameter than the bruise on your thigh that had slammed into the center console, a bruise larger than your hand - palm, fingers, wrist.

Add it to the list of aches.

- A shoulder brace with its
 - » 50 thousand dollar surgery
 - » and 20 percent success rate;
- ribs full of family curse;
- an ankle that clicks with the wrong twist;
- a heart full of all the things you can't forget
 - » like the year you prodigalized in bed
 - » and the assignment you didn't finish
on time last night;
- a jammed ring finger;
- a mindful realization of a future right
where you are;
- a volleyball sized bruise on the outside
of your left thigh.

No matter, your boyfriend keeps driving you places. But I told you months ago I'd sooner trust your driving going 100 than his going 70. I haven't seen Captain Phasma parked near the piles of plowed snow in the pet store parking lot because she's been in the shop. Add the bill to the list.

Stormy Seattle Night

Jamie Wyatt

Haunting, circular
specter hanging
on a hook
in the inky sky

 crouched, peeking on a bed of threatening storm clouds
pregnant with rainwater a threat forthcoming

My Slumber Disjointed

 Interrupted Broken

 How you sing bravado,
heard from my little windowsill.

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Invulnerable

Emily Lyon



Alone

Nic Cain

I was just a kid when you sent me away, when you excused me from the family, when you pushed me from the group and made me become someone else. Family is safe, I heard. Family is love, I heard. Family is everything, I heard. I heard all these things and all these things are bullshit. The false platitudes that rang down for years. The fake noises that come from the idiot box that sits in the corner and pushes cancer into our souls. You sent me away. It was just for two nights, you said. It wasn't just for two nights. It was forever. You were meant to protect me. You were meant to keep me from harm. It was all a lie. I learned my lesson then and carry it with me now. The lesson filtered into my mind as I lay on my back and stared out the skylight into the dark night. Filtered stars glistened or was it the tears that flooded my eyes but refused to fall? I gritted my teeth against the pain inside. I gripped the sheets as there was nothing else to cling to. The cheap knockoff Walkman you gave me for Christmas attempted to drown out the noise in my head, but just reinforced the message "blame it on me, you can blame it on me." The batteries ran dry - the tape slowed, dribbling out the words "when it gets right down to it there's no one really left to blame, blame it on me." When you came to get me, I was not the child you left. You told me I was brave. You told me I was strong. Those words held no truth. Your words meant nothing. Your words mean nothing. Many years later you told me you loved me. The ocean between us was far more than a physical distance. It was a decade past the time it mattered.

The Year of the Rat

Rebekah Pusateri

It was fitting that this was the year of the rat. The way the rats ran, tumbling over each other in haste to reach the water before their hair singed, reminded Marcus of the hordes of people who ran over fallen bodies, crushing bones, to get the last box of cereal. The animalistic nature gets the better of everyone. It takes only a short time before people forget their intellectual reasoning and give in to the urges of survival. A shudder shook Marcus as he remembered *Lord of the Flies*. How absurd it seemed now, as he sat in school and discussed how long it would take someone to go crazy when put in extreme circumstances. He thought the book was an exaggeration, that William Golding clearly wanted to scare people into thinking that deep down, they're all monsters. But it turns out, he was right.

It started during Marcus's spring break. He, like all the other college kids, went home to mooch off his parents. Marcus wanted to experience the blissfully free rent, free housekeeping, and free food once more. His friends took off to Florida to get drunk on the beach, but Marcus didn't have enough money or travel lust to go with them. He stayed behind, but he didn't mind. His friends' incessant chatter, drunken stupor, and flippancy about responsibility irked him sometimes. Marcus needed a break from them just like he needed a break from school. Marcus switched majors twice before settling on business.

"It's the best major for people who don't know what they want to do. That and psychology," his advisor had stated six months ago.

"Okay," Marcus had said.

"When you start looking for jobs after graduation, just tell people you studied business. They'll hire you."

Marcus had nodded and done exactly that. He kept working towards his degree, partly because he was interested in business, and partly because his parents threatened to stop paying his tuition if he changed majors one more time.

The Tuesday of Marcus's spring break was when the first news report came in. Marcus didn't know that anything was happening in other parts of the world. No one spoke of the plague that killed two thousand people in Asia, Africa, and even South America. Those second- and third-world countries were easy to forget about.

Marcus sat on the couch eating his second bowl of chips when his parents ran downstairs.

"Turn on the TV!" his dad commanded. Normally, his dad wasn't the scary parent because of his sweater vests, mousy shape, glasses, and greying hair. That day though, that day his dad scared him. Marcus jumped up, scattering the rest of his potato chips on the couch and the floor. His mom didn't even scold him because what was on the news was more important.

Images of rats boldly marching across roads, people dying, people in hospitals, little girls crying and reaching out for their mothers—flashed across the screen. Marcus and his parents stood there, eyes unblinking, mouths partly open, the phone ringing in the background.

“Wha. . .what?” Marcus stuttered. His voice sounded raspy. The burnt smell of brownies wafted down and still, the family stood there.

“I . . . heard but . . . I didn’t . . . think it was true,” his dad breathed out.

“What? What have you heard?” Marcus asked. He fell back down on the couch covered in potato chips. His dad rubbed his face, stretching it out, bunching it back, as if that would undo the creases created from years of stress. His mom slowly rested a hand on his shoulder.

“We heard that something was happening in other countries. That people were starting to get sick, but we didn’t know that it would get this bad. We didn’t know,” Marcus’s mom ended in a whisper. A cry strangled her throat. Eventually, they noticed the thickness of the air and his mom ran back up to get her burnt brownies out of the oven. The brownies were charred and crumbly, emitting a smell that permeated their house.

From then on, Marcus and his parents watched the news every night. It started slow. People were saying the plague that took over the other countries was sad, yes, but it would never reach the United States of America. After all, Americans had advanced technology and medicine the other countries didn’t have, right? Videos of rats marching up through South America and Middle America and jumping onto cruise ships played on a loop. Then, people said that even if the rats made it over and carried the plague with them, Americans could blockade them. People were getting nervous. The suspense was palpable. Marcus went out to a grocery store and saw adults nervously whispering to themselves in corners. Their teeth chattered and their stressed, yellowish eyes stared him down. He noticed the line at the pet store across the street wrapped around the building. People were trying to return their pet rats, mice, and even hamsters.

Next, schools closed. With the stress of the looming rats, neither students nor teachers could concentrate. Some lower-income schools were already infested with rats, so the government decided it was best for no one to go to school. It was impossible to tell what rat was infected with the plague and what rat was normal. People took it upon themselves to hit, kick, and tear apart any rat they came across. It was better to be safe than sorry, people said. A rat is a rat, others said.

With his spring break extended indefinitely, Marcus realized he didn’t enjoy having free time as much as he thought. He was itching to graduate and get out of the house. The vacation, once his expectation-free paradise, turned into his parents checking his eyes, his ears, and his temperature for any signs

of sickness. Marcus thought longingly about his friends in Florida. He texted them “yo guys. My parents are killing me with their helicoptering. When are you coming back?” Marcus didn’t hear back for a few days, which was odd. He did later see an Instagram post of his friends on the beach clutching their beers. He had to take a second glance because it looked like their eyes had a yellow glint, but it must’ve just been the reflection of the moonlight.

Marcus’s parents became obsessed with the news. They sat in front of the TV all day while scrolling through Facebook to see the latest conspiracy theories. Scientists called this rat plague Bubonic 2.0.

“Oh wow, look at what Aunt Carol posted,” Marcus’s dad slid his phone over to Marcus’s mom. She read the post, “THERE WASN’T A LOT OF MILK IN THE STORE TODAY. EVERYONE NEEDS TO RUN OUT AND BUY NOW BEFORE IT’S TOO LATE. – CAROL.” His parents looked at each other for a moment before his mom lunged towards her shoes.

“I’ll grab the keys,” his dad said.

“Should I go?” Marcus asked.

“No,” his dad said. His parents left in the next two minutes, leaving Marcus to stare at the TV, the news droning on in his head becoming nothing but background noise.

Three days later, the stores were completely out of food. It turned out that more people than just Aunt Carol noticed the dwindling supply. Marcus’s parents grabbed everything they could even if it would go bad, even if they would never eat it. They grabbed it because they could. Because it made them feel safe to see food stacked to the ceiling. If the rats came running down their street and infected the neighbors, Marcus’s family would be ready for it. Marcus estimated that they wouldn’t need to leave their house for months.

When Marcus grabbed another bag of potato chips from The Pile, he noticed his dad holding something.

“What is that, Dad?”

“Nothing. Go back to the TV,” his dad turned around and put his hand in his coat.

“Dad? What are you hiding?” His dad gave him a weak smile and left the room. Later, Marcus searched through his parents’ bedroom. There was a cold, gleaming pistol at the bottom of his dad’s underwear drawer. His neck prickled at the sound of his dad’s voice behind him.

“It’s just in case.”

“In case of what?”

His dad shrugged. “People do crazy things in crazy times.” Marcus stared at his dad, his mousy, timid dad. “Please don’t tell your mom,” his dad continued. “I don’t want to worry her.” Marcus nodded, feeling the weight of the knowledge

crushing down on him.

It was after Marcus found the gun that the TV stopped showing videos from other countries. Instead, it showed Americans stampeding in grocery stores, fighting over food, screaming, and crying. People were killed while being swept along with the crowd, eventually falling and getting crushed under people's feet. The grimaces and snarls on people's faces didn't even look human.

Marcus spent his days positioned at the window, calling out to his parents if he noticed a neighbor walking outside or saw anything move. It was only a matter of time before people nearby started acting sick or before something plump and well fed would crawl out of the garbage can, scaring away all the racoons. His parents built a fence around their house and yelled if a neighbor got too close. It had only been two months since Americans first heard of Bubonic 2.0.

One morning, Marcus ate his coveted box of cereal at the window while his parents were out scavenging for more toilet paper. He heard a scratching noise that sounded like it came from downstairs. At first it was faint, but then it escalated into frantic scraping at the backyard door. Marcus's mouth went dry. The gun was still hidden in his dad's underwear drawer for all he knew. He hesitated, then got up from his post and headed downstairs. The scraping stopped. There was a click and the door slowly swung open.

"Mr. Jackson?" Marcus froze. The neighbor gasped and dropped a silver tool from his hand. His body trembled in waves.

"Marcus, I'm sorry sorry sorry," he gasped out. "There was no milk, and Monica, you know Monica is only three, keeps asking for some, but the milk, there is no milk at the store, because I checked the Walmart and the Fred Meyer and then Safeway, both of them, and then the convenience store on 23rd street, but there was no milk." Mr. Jackson crumbled to the floor, sobbing.

Vomit burned Marcus's throat. "Get out."

"I'm, I'm sorry?" Mr. Jackson looked up and finally made eye contact-Marcus's crystal blue eyes with his yellowed ones. Then, Mr. Jackson glanced towards The Pile. Both of their bodies clenched with the knowledge of what was about to happen. Mr. Jackson bolted towards the pile as Marcus screamed and threw himself on Mr. Jackson. He punched him, choked him, did everything he could to save his family's stash. It was all they had left. Nothing else mattered but The Pile. Mr. Jackson coughed, and blood splattered over the canned food. He pulled the last bag of potatoes free and ran, stumbling out the door. Marcus stood there panting, examining the flattened boxes of cereal, the smooshed bags of chips, and the bloodied cans strewn about the floor. The rats had arrived.

Marcus's parents were furious when they came home with three Costco-size packages of toilet paper. His dad took him aside.

"Marcus. I thought we knew what to do if something like this were to

happen.”

“What? What are you talking about?”

“You know,” his dad put his thumb up and pointed his index finger while his other fingers were tucked into his hand.

Marcus stepped back. “Dad? But that could’ve killed Mr. Jackson!”

“I know.” His dad rubbed his face. Red and yellow splotches bloomed on his dad’s hand.

Marcus’s mouth went dry. “Dad. What’s on your hand?” His dad’s head jolted up, and he tried to push down the sleeves of his jacket.

“Now Marcus, my skin has always been dry—”

“No. No. No.” Marcus shook his head, backing up a step and then another. “Get away from me!” His dad reached out towards him, eyes pleading. Marcus ran to tell his mom.

The house was quieter now that Marcus and his mom made his dad quarantine himself in the guest bedroom. Marcus’s mom scrubbed every inch of the house with bleach and would then wipe herself with off-brand Clorox wipes (because authentic Clorox wipes were only on Ebay selling for \$100 per container) every day. Marcus installed more locks on all their doors so no more neighbors could break in. At mealtimes, Marcus would place food outside his dad’s door. He could hear him coughing in there. Had his eyes turned yellow yet? Would his mom be next?

As Marcus tossed and turned in bed at night, he imagined he could hear rats’ claws scratching in the walls, or see the occasional black shadow move in the corner. It was surreal, like a nightmare. Everything seemed overdramatic and fuzzy, like Marcus was going to wake up at any moment. But he never did.

During the usual 6 pm broadcast from the president, Marcus and his mom sat in front of the TV, barely breathing, to hear the latest news. The president walked out to the microphone on a podium, his skin looking more yellow than the usual spray-tan orange. His hoarse voice announced that the only way to kill the rats and save the country was to burn them, to burn everything.

“People should start preparing now to leave their homes if they can,” the president continued. There would be a nation-wide burning in a final attempt to kill off the rats. Marcus and his mom glanced at each other. The president’s voice kept going, but the ringing in Marcus’s ears was louder.

His mom started to speak. She had new wrinkles around her eyes and skin that sagged more around her mouth. “I guess it’s time. We’ll need to start packing. And let your dad know.”

Marcus’s family (his dad kept a safe six feet away, so his boil droplets wouldn’t touch them) and neighbors packed up their most precious belongings and hiked to a metal bridge to be safe from the burning. It made sense at the

time, Marcus thought, watching the charred, crumbly rats flee to the river from his spot on the bridge. People huddled together in one last act of humanity. The burning would wipe out everything Americans worked so hard for. It would kill the country to save the people. The more Marcus thought about it, the more he realized: the rats didn't just arrive four months ago.

My Father's House and the Melody of the Seagull

Theresa Daigle

Aqua blue tiles on a kitchen wall crashing waves of emotion
like foamy bubbles mingling with briny saltiness East

coast. Smoking cigarettes burning my eyes and tears of the perfect little holes I
burnt on the arms of a lounge chair. Indications you were there too

bright orange paint in a playroom bought on sale to brighten a dark space.
Diving in, drowning out the rest of the world. A watery

blanket surrounds me amidst the unending legs
of people unknown—the Seagull *Caw Caw Caw*.

Salvation Army barbies, whose legs never bent forever in a stiff-legged
pose. Brillo-pad wild-hair let's call her "Frances" of happiness in secrets

of anxious anxiety overflowing ashtrays and Macintosh
apples. A tart red offering of trees conquered house among the concrete

and brick pinball machines and Luke Skywalker forest green Bay State Bank
savings passbook. *Where will my \$5 take me?* Away from the brown and blue dust

collectors? Away from the reel-to-reel recordings stolen from Rankin/Bass
productions. Away from the black tar burning my bare feet as I plunge into a sea

of chlorine— *Caw Caw Caw*. Poseidon's playground nestled among vestiges
of life paying homage to the tamed beauty and the call of the seagull awakening

yearnings to return to waters past clouds mimicking single seagull pacing an old
man seeking meaning and understanding in a wormy feast. The melody of the
seagull marking

time as the walkers keep cadence with the bird *Caw Caw Caw*. Naked branches
reaching with droplets of diamonds shimmering prisms and the single sound

of the seagull calling out to unknown friends of a watery playground. *Caw*. Spikey
green and deadly brown grasses reaching up from the hard ground as the cold.

Bad Water

Caitlyn Pregana

with a line from Joan Fleming

People thought you were *all gold leaf and good water*. But the way you kissed me when I didn't want it. The mockery. You thought it was funny.

I found myself giving in when I didn't want to, because you were a "nice guy."

You were bad water.

You were stagnant water. I was a fly laying eggs in your danger. Your stillness. The larvae of your memory. Now I have dengue fever and no prescription will take it away.

It's All Over Me

Savannah Moss



Do You Point at Me Now?

Bryce Grant

Mrs. S was bipolar. She taught

Statistics

To one hundred ungrateful seniors

That thought

She was

up

then

down,

hot

then

cold,

yes

then

no;

A cliché we'd seen in movies, a line we'd heard in a song, a joke we'd watched
on a stage.

Behind closed doors we giggled with blushing cheeks at the old withered
woman, who on some days would yell too much or cry at the lectern or
laugh so loud the neighboring classroom could hear.

I blamed a bad grade on her being crazy, once. I told my mom,

Maybe if she weren't so crazy, I wouldn't have failed so badly

And my mother told me to be kinder, but I wasn't.

I am bipolar. I learned

Statistics:

One out of one hundred adults

Will feel

the peak of a mountain with the breeze in his hair
then

the sunken depression of wind worn valleys,

the cracked and barren plains of a sun-bleached, sand-scorched desert

then

the etched and barren wasteland of an ice-strewn, snow-held tundra,

The dimple cheeked smile when you're down on one knee and asking for her hand

then

the tear stained cheek when the vet put her down and your mom asked if you were okay.

It isn't like the movies where a studio audience presses you to laugh, or a song with a blonde who sings the high harmonies, or a joke with a punch line to soothe the festered burn.

Behind closed doors I weep with blushing cheeks at how old and withered I feel. Some days I scream at the walls until my voice is ragged or cry under my sheets until my pillow is damp or cackle until there is a knock on my door and my neighbor asks me, while she's wearing a night robe, to please keep it down.

I blamed my suffering on my wife, once. I told her,

Maybe if she weren't so crazy, we wouldn't have failed so badly

And I wish I was kinder, but I wasn't.

1100 Degrees Fahrenheit

Tami Jensen

It takes 17 minutes to burn an old house,
I know this now.
Only the chimney looms, a charred brick tower.
It stares out over what was once a living room,
now a bed of soft-lumber ash.
It exhales the sharp smell of scorched pine.
Entire walls collapse when a house is empty.
One side of the yard still smolders a warm breath,
the last living thing.
Five orange cones mark the places we died
before our mother lit a match,
before our house sighed the sulfur scent of keratin on fire.

De la Tierra

Marisa Villanueva

I look around baton in hand and see una niña a wetback
in the corner of a gray concrete cell urinated sheets

she is caged.

She is a heart cracked open water flowing down a car horn honk
a face sliding across concrete brown hair blown back

I see her.

Me Mrs. purple bag eyes legs forced open USA! USA! USA!
stitched lips shut torn clothes cold eyes forced with light

I see this little wetback.

The puta that beaner the slota the chismosa the
cochinada borracha yellow skinned bruta

the spic.

Her r's the vibrations rolling off her tongue la reina
la rana rosita rata rancho rosca rincón

rosita raro.

That criminal that job stealer the leacher the rapist
the murderer the scum the gangster debajo

de la tierra.

The dealer the crackhead the chola the
prostitute legs with a coin slot venga

the whore.

Her ella that esa stupid stupida
idiot idiota filthy mugrosa

pendeja.

They are crossing over a river intertwining fingers with soil
they are crossing over a river barging into our doors

they are crossing over a river.

They are crossing over a river eating off my table

sitting at my table feet in water staining my cover

they are crossing over a river.

They are crossing over a river golden wrapped box stealing what is mine
they are crossing over a river eating scraps designed by artists

they are crossing over a river.

Talking in their hidden codes mixing with the bud sprouting
from fresh watered planted fertilized soil

la suciedad.

Honorary badge the good cop hands in pocket leaning
on a baton gun in mouth tongue pulling trigger

cop only a good cop.

black coche unseen tinted windows
bodies with blindfolds for eyes.

Pop. Pop. Pop.

Mother's tears mixed with sons' bodily wine flames growing moving
rushing jolting dark empty pre-carved wooden

rectangle box.

Pop. Pop. Pop. barrio to barrio dusk to dawn white
powder stain on her nose sweet and lethal

Pop. Pop. Pop.

Want a familia? father left mom hands pressed sore hugging rounded
beads clasping la cruz knees kissing the hardwood dusty floor

hija! Donde esta?

Faded purple splotched ink yellow tint legs cigar décor smoky ringed charms
ashes dusted blankets stomach swallow transport go

Pop. Pop. Pop.

Brother knows el jefe bandana baggy shirt cheek tearmarked
packs with 2 every day right hand hombre want a familia?

Pop. Pop. Pop.

The chained bodies forced entries olive
baby skin joven waist

silk lace.

One goes for 2,000 y la otra 50k red pumped lips
silicone chest barbie doll for sale

Pop. Pop. Pop.

Jumping fences slathered scabs holes for shoes extended a hand of
captivity feet in 4 by 4 wire room holes to breathe night means

you get the freezer.

Iridescent lights the day and the night
ripped cotton rectangle same grey

brown stained shirt.

metal crinkled cover pillow right or left arm
2-inch pad half inch space

holes for air.

Wet drops on face exhausted throat vocal chords webbed
green and white snot sleeve for

wipes. cover. shelter.

Eat drink swallow squat sit stay
watch wait pray USA! USA! USA!

que es la paz?

She is only 9 no mother no father
no brother hollow clouded sun

gone.

Death hunger violence only 9 caged
captive she is 9 only 9 she is

left.

Singed Fingertips Under the Greasy Kitchen Bulb

Karla Maravilla

Peeling plastic, she slides the tortilla to her hand,
four per corner onto the comal. Música Christiana plays,
though she hasn't gone to church in years.

She mashes the burnt tomatoes in the molcajete,
the pestle bloody with wrinkled flesh and green seeds,
I am asked to flip my first tortilla.

Under the greasy kitchen bulb,
thumb and pointer finger
pinch the mushy skin of baked maize.

Edges interlap like a dumpling
bursting to flower,
my red fingers—dancing petals.

Floured hands grip to wrists,
A mother unfamiliar with maize play-doh
has me wash my hands, sit on a chair.

Like pizza dough, palms flip and flip,
spank and twirl inflating maize frisbees,
fingers gliding like skates against hell's iron.

The breath of god is a cold gasp,
a sharp intake against singed fingers
rubbing against splintered wood.

Teeth grind dead flesh,
powdered soup granules sleep
beneath gnawed pearl nails.

A child's attempt to wash the cold,
A mother's attempt to follow faith,
A tortilla's attempt to blossom.

Blossoms in the Evening

Maya Herbert



...And We Sang Hallelujah

Champagne Ryder

October 7th, 2018

I walk a hallway like it's biblical.

I arrive at the hospital of my hometown.

I find myself in room 413.

I am greeted with the sight of my father.

Once, a man strong enough to move mountains out of his way.

Now being kept alive with a series of plastic tubes and beeps,

I don't cry.

I do what I've done the last 3 years.

Swallow the rising emotion in order to have the last conversation with my
father.

The conversation I have is one-sided.

I am assured that he can hear me.

I am then greeted with a happy face in a place
that smells damp with tears.

Thick with inevitable decisions.

Nurse Joy (that's her name) tells me she's been taking care of him.

Grabs my arm with tenderness as if she can sense my brokenness.

I fear death.

I fear evil.

I am walked into a family waiting room that resembles the streets at night.

I wait.

The room, slowly, becomes full.

A somber occasion turned family reunion.

A family reunion turned congregation.

All my family meeting each other, to me, feels like the first time.

Uncle Mike Clark argues with my Uncle FunkDaddy about who has the better
mixes.

Uncle Hotlink laughing with my Pastor Shawn Fletcher.

My best friend, Harkarn, all business.

This would be the first time I ever saw him cry.

Once composed, he's accepted into the congregation.
My Aunts Kim, Kelly, and Cassie checking in on my mother.
My sister is comforted by her friends.
At that moment the sun shined through the tear stained windows.

Together, we turned a room haunted with shadows and death
into a church choir.

We rejoiced with stories of my father.

My father...
My father, the pastor of this congregation.

Not a word left his lips,
but his words were recited by our congregation.

We sang his testimonies,
and we sang songs of his return.

My father so stubborn,
never accepting of anything.

As my Auntie rubs him in holy oil.
She prays to whatever God she believes in.

Prays to whoever shall listen.
To pull him back from the other side.

A doctor comes in to break up the choir.
To give a grim status no one wanted to hear.

As the congregation fell silent,
my voice rose to ask the question.
That was already written on the walls.

When the doctor told us less than 50%
the choir erupted in testimony.

For my Father was a gambling man,
we sang testimonies of how he always beaten the odds.

This church, erected in his honor.
Sang songs about his triumph.
For my father will be the mortal that conquered death.

My mother, ever so strong,
she built me to be stronger.

I gave her a hug.
She let a hallelujah escape from her lips.

Long into the night,
the odds became too high to overcome.

We locked arms and marched through the valley.
Singing at the top of our lungs.

Songs in my father's honor.
Rejoicing in his testimony.

And we marched with a purpose.
To spread my father's glory.

Marched...
to the local bowling alley.
Next to the hospital,

continuing our church sermon.
We stormed the bowling alley,
with the same fire as the Lord's Holy Blade.

Marched in as if it was the temple of God.
Flipped tables,
casted out nonbelievers,

my father has ascended.
And we Sang hallelujah.

We silenced the explosions of pins.
Ordered the entire menu.

Daring the Devil to crash our last supper.
Go ahead, deny my father the rest he deserved.

For his eternal rest would be far from peaceful.
For we made sure my father's arrival was expected.

I know,
my father pulled up to heaven's gates.

We the vehicle,
our songs the sound system that drowned out Daniel's Horn.

We made sure,
Peter welcomed my father.

With the same love,
we used to let him go.

Sister//Sister

Karla Maravilla

We were clumps of Nestle chocolate melded together
on that old spring mattress with the azalea bouquets
and a single red rose thorned onto a cotton pillowcase
the two of us SURE to fall into carpet and grass and dirt
and magma if our pixel painted selves could breathe inside glossy canvas.

I am a roasted almond cinder to your devil's chocolate.
Frosted in blue dress and diaper from skull to frilly sock.
Lilac ballet shoes, braided bow headband, bow puffy cupcake
sleeves, and a baby doll bill, flat on turtle's back, fins flapping:
pull my string and hear me gaggle.

You were a 90's tank top purple to my Happy Ever After.
Snowflakes plucked from the clouds, pressed with mother's iron.
Too baggy butt blue seamed dream denims that touch white high-tops,
brows thin like our mothers, an overplucked Mexican Barbie thrown
broke from falling off the shelf.

But now, in the frame of my pupils and the curve of your cataracts,
I'm an e-girl weaboo planning on buying a soob-uwu,
A part-time Dollar Tree Cashier where the men hand me
crumpled dollars and demands for sex loans, knowing well
that I am nineteen to their twoscore.

I lay next to you in this framed reality where we curl up on my twin bed
with our morbidly obese cats, thumbs scrolling through TikTok where I see
the personalized page of your sex drive, depression, and postmodern humor,
you, big sister, a Big Five Full-Time Manager who got yelled at by the same guy
three times cause you couldn't sell him that gun he wanted to barrel in the
Yakima River,

relapsed into Band Class where the world sunk slow, blood blue in your veins
where 25 minutes passed, and no one found you red on the ground without a
face
to wrinkle and I think how you've always been the broken barbie doll who pulls
my
babble tongued string for a laugh when the spring of the mattress and flesh of
cats
can't soak tears fast enough. Do you remember that time I drove you to your
best
friend's party and you got drunk?

I was the only seventeen-year-old there who was sober, prepared to drive you
home
away from the bonfire that was burning ash into your puff jacket when you told
me
you didn't really hate me, that you only wanted the best for me, how vaping
made you fuzzy and drinking made you colder, that our families double-sided
love for my university success and your technical school failure made you all
the lonelier?

I think back to that moment in this framed reality of TikTok bedding.
I want to hear you say I Love You again, because hermana,
shit hurts for me too.

Wonderful Time

Lynn Magill

1. You would watch us, playing catch. Softball. Through the backyard fence. We'd stop and scratch your ears through the chain link.
2. "Do you want it?" they asked over the fence. We don't have time for a dog anymore.
3. They handed you over. Crate, treats, and one toy. Just one. And never asked or said a word about you again.
4. They lived there two more years. We moved first.
5. The next month, they got a new puppy.
6. We learned that you were untrained. No sit, no stay, no heeling.
7. You bit once. When our daughter tried to take your toy away.
8. He wanted to take you to the shelter. Dangerous. Too risky.
9. I Googled so much. *Give me a chance. Us a chance.*
10. Lunch meat saved your life. You would do anything for lunch meat. Learned every command in three days and never snapped again.
11. You were terrified of grates, stairs, garbage cans, lampposts.
12. They say aggression is really acting out fear.
13. The neighbor's wife left him. Told everybody he was aggressive. We never saw their puppy again.
14. I was at work. He carried you in a sling made from one of your favorite fleece throw blankets and drove like Hell to the emergency vet.
15. I got that call. It was too late. Alive, but unseeing eyes. Brain damage. Should we? The vet wants to know.

16.
We can wait until I get home from work, but they don't think you'll recognize us.

19.
The photo is on our table. The frame says: *Thank you for everything. I had a wonderful time.*

22.
Your brothers still look for you. So do we.

25.
We held each other and cried for days. You taught him that there is no weakness in crying. He needed that.

17.
Here, but not here anymore. Time to choose what we want to remember.

20.
I can't even look at it most days.

23.
You loved booze. I learned to keep my wine glass out of reach and warn our friends.

26.
Others have been lived because you taught us patience.

18.
Is choosing the when and how we go a blessing or is ignorance bliss?

21.
Here I sit, with a wad of toilet paper. Can't cry at funerals, but devastated over a five-year-old picture frame.

24.
The day that frozen beer keg exploded on the patio was the best day of your entire life.

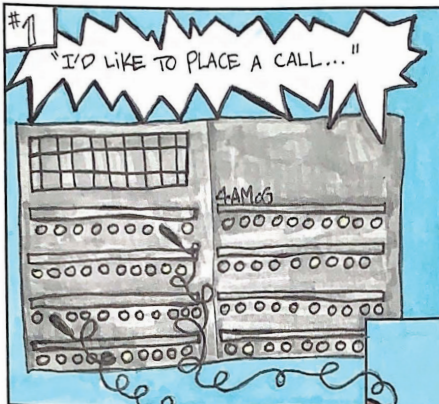
27.
Thank you for everything. We had a wonderful time.

Rotary in the Woods

Jamie Wyatt

TITLE: ROTARY IN THE WOODS

BY: JAMIE WYATT



YOU USED TO BERATE ME INTO
HIKING—DANCING AMONG THE
TREES— YOU CALLED IT
WIND RUSTLES THE BRANCHES,
LIKE AN OLD FAMILIAR SONG ON
THE RADIO



TINY URN OF
ASH— THUMP
THUMP, THUMP—
BESIDE MY HEART
FOUR SEASONS GONE
BUT I'M STUCK IN THIS
ETERNAL WINTER

YOU CLIMB THE DIRT PATH, BOOTS SLIDING IN
THE SOIL, TREES STRETCHING LIMBS OUT,
LIKE HANDS REACHING, STRETCHING
TOWARDS THEIR CREATOR— OR MAYBE JUST YOU



(INSPIRED BY "TELEPHONE OF THE WIND" BY COREY DEMBECK)

Dog Burial

Zach Schloss

Mo had to bury the mutt before class. She died in the night, and Mo's dad, Jim, wanted her in the ground early. As Mo lugged Luna to the spot next to the fence line of their small backyard, her head and backside drooped down his arms like a slinky held from the middle. Adjacent to the yard's short fence, the grave was going to be right within view of Mr. Harison's cherry orchard. The trees' fruit had just ripened, and the deep-green leaves rattled in the morning's breeze.

Mo and his dad picked away at their chosen dirt patch with their shovels, right up against the fence. Of course, Mo had the short shovel. He'd never gotten the long one. George had when he was still home. He used that long shovel when he and Jim dug holes for fence posts, flowers, or whatever they used to do out in the yard. Jim didn't seem to mind using that stubby shovel back then. Never with Mo, though. He always used the longer one with Mo.

"Did your mom tell you? Your brother just got promoted to that manager position," Jim said. He speared his shovel at the edge of their shallow hole, spitting into it. The glob of saliva nearly hit Mo on his boot.

"Oh. Did he?" Mo asked as he kicked some dirt over the spit.

Jim tugged his yellow gloves from his fingers and tossed them to the ground. One landed across Luna's snout. "Yeah. The one he's been shooting for."

"That's good." Mo kept digging. "I— uh..."

"What?" His dad's head tilted up from the hole.

"I got... an A on my exam," said Mo.

"Oh. Well... Good." Jim started shoveling again.

"Yeah," said Mo. He watched his dad shovel harder and watched his eyes cut through the dirt. They relaxed whenever the topic was about George. Now they squinted. The surrounding muscles—brows, cheeks, and nose bridge—always tensed up near Mo. The corners of his mouth also tightened and quivered slightly. There was hardly a scowl, but it was still there—buried somewhere in his face. He would show it whenever George had some new job, and Mo would walk in the room, still jobless or with half a job. A glower would begin to surface in Jim's cheekbones, like the one afternoon of George's first day working for Mr. Harrison. George came home, jeans smeared green, fingers packed brown, and boots cracked and caked. Mo couldn't match in his dryer-sheet-scented shirt and shorts. Jim's almost scowl would begin to show when the brothers were anywhere near each other. So, Mo kept away while his dad and George went outside that late day to plant white roses.

The two would look out at the glow of evening, its golden shine hitting those orchard leaves. Mo's dad and George watched the orchard like it was the Garden of Eden. The light spilled onto the two of them, their faces bright, their backs shadows. George's wrists rotated to the beat of his prattling mouth. Jim nodded. The pair huddled at that fence like some secret club, brilliant sun as

their backdrop. Hallowed. Exclusive. Then Luna rocketed over and peed right on the roses. It wasn't a marking thing. They were just planted in her pissing spot. That was Mo's only "in" that day, to slip inside the club and laugh about the stupid dog with George and his dad. Then Mo snuck away to avoid the return of that crushing look. And now he had to endure it while burying the poor pup.

"So, when are you going to be finished with school?" Jim asked, not looking away from the hole.

"What?" Mo asked.

"When are you going to be done with all that and get a better job?"

"Well... if I get my Master's after this, it'll—"

"Shit, you're doing more??" Jim let his shovel drop onto the pile of dirt, just as he was about to empty it.

Mo didn't want to say anything to that. His dad was on the edge of starting his "workforce" talk. *George didn't do school. George has a good job. George is well-off.* Well, George might hit the glass ceiling. Mo kept himself quiet. He kept digging. He didn't have time to stop. His class started soon, maybe in an hour. "I need your help to get this done in time."

"In time for what??" His dad asked.

"Class!" Mo shouted.

"Why are you worried about class when you got poor Luna here?" Jim didn't even glance at her. He just pointed down. "Don't rush it. Don't do a half-assed job on her grave!"

Mo wanted to fling his shovel. He wanted to stop and scream at his dad, but there was no time. He had to get the grave dug. And arguing wouldn't make things change the way he wanted. It wouldn't make his dad's eyes easy like they were with George. Luna used to relax everyone. When she came sniffing around their yard like some clueless gumshoe, when she panted up at Jim with her wide smile, Mo became as much a son as George.

"Yeah. You're right. Sorry." Mo said. Pushing that apology out strained his neck. His dad didn't say anything. He just spat. So, Mo continued, "Remember... when— when Luna barked at that plastic bag that blew through the yard?"

Jim snickered. "Yeah... yeah. Right, she thought it was a bird or something."

"And then when she caught it, she— she carried it back like a trophy," Mo added, "With her proud little tail wagging around."

His dad picked his shovel up and started to dig. The two of them dug together. "She was the silliest little stinker. What year was that?"

"I don't remember," said Mo.

"I think—" Jim looked toward the orchards beyond their yard—"I think that was the summer George started his first job. Picking cherries for Mr. Harison... Hey, maybe you could ask him for some work. Y'know, get some more hours."

“Maybe,” said Mo. He focused on digging. Talking to his dad was like holding a slinky from the middle, like holding Luna’s corpse. Mo never could keep it from spilling out. He had to strain for one side or another. It was a balancing act. He’d bend down for his dad and scoop things up. As Mo dug, his eyes followed the motion of his crap shovel, from the hole to the pile of dirt above. In his peripheral, Luna was almost staring at him. The blur of his dad’s yellow glove that laid across her stiff snout and the exposed bone of her front leg—which had festered and boiled with yellow infection until her passing—looked almost the same. Mo made a fantasy of it. That other yellow blur on the leg was his dad’s glove too. He’d thrown them on the napping mutt while they dug. They were going to put a tree sapling in, just Mo and him. Not George. George was inside. And Mo had the long shovel. His dad even handed it to him. They talked about Mo’s classes. His dad smiled, eyes at ease.

The Last Visit

Timory Malone

This hospital smells like artificial lemons and bleach. It smells like something I won't be able to wash out of my clothes for a few weeks. I really shouldn't have worn my favorite sweater here, it's not like you care what I'm wearing, and now I'll have this smell stuck to my clothes as a reminder of this sterile place. The lights are too fluorescent, and the tile floor is too shiny and white, the reflection off the perfect white squares hurts my eyes. The machines beep too loudly, the nurses smile too big, everything here is too something.

Except for you, you're just something, just barely something. You're just awake, just talking, just alive. I don't know how much longer you'll just be here, but I know that when I leave you it will be for the last time.

God, it really stinks in here. It's like someone dissolved a package of car air fresheners, those tree shaped ones that hang on your rear-view mirror, into a gallon of bleach. I know I just got here, but I already can't wait to leave. I think I should probably stay longer, but that smell is really getting to me, it feels like it's burning the inside of my nose. I pull the thick turtle-neck sweater up over my face to help cover the smell. I tell you it's because I'm cold. The faint remnants of fabric softener are just barely enough to help cover the chemical stench.

You tell me I don't have to stay; I should go out and have fun and thanks for visiting, but just because you're stuck in a hospital doesn't mean that I am, and you're sorry your hair is such a mess. It takes you a long time to say this, but it feels like a flood of words all the same. I can tell that talking takes a lot of your energy, energy that has become a finite resource, so I just sit with you quietly while that hourglass filled with the time you have left continues to empty. I feel like I can see it speeding up as it runs out.

A nurse comes in to check on something, an IV or one of the beeping monitors. She squirts a bottle of hand sanitizer and absently coats her hands halfway down her forearms. So that's where the smell is coming from. I can tell she's done it about a million times before, I wonder how many times every day she ritualistically rubs sanitizer up and down each finger. I bet she can't even smell it anymore.

"How are we doing today?" the nurse smiles so big it looks like she could swallow me whole, "it looks like you have a special visitor."

You nod weakly and half smile, "This is my granddaughter *Tam-ory*" you tell her, mispronouncing my name in the exact same way you have for the last 17 years. I think you might look a little happy, or a little proud, but you mostly just look like you're dying.

There is a TV on. I can't tell if you're actually watching the infomercial for the *Showtime Rotisserie & BBQ*, but you're looking at the TV, so I look at you. You still look like you. I always hear people say that they can't or don't *or don't want* to recognize loved ones when they're hospitalized and full of wires and

tubes, wearing an open backed gown that has probably had more people die in it than a haunted house. But you do look like you, one eyebrow darker than the other, smile just a little lopsided, the same mole on your neck that I know I have on mine. You're you, but you're just you.

You tell me you're tired, but we both know that you just want me to feel like it's ok for me to leave. I want to leave, get outside into some fresh air. I think I'll have to take my sweater off for the drive home or else I won't be able to breathe in the car either. I'll probably have to put it in the trunk. I can see you fading, that hourglass of yours is down to its last dribble of sand.

I get up to hug you goodbye. Not just goodbye, but goodbye goodbye. I try not to crush any tubes or loosen anything stuck or taped to your body. It seems like there is something foreign everywhere I touch. You feel the same underneath it all, soft and warm; sort of papery skin that wrinkles and folds where I touch it. I thought you would feel different too, but your hug feels just like the ones you've always given me, like coming over for the holidays and feeling you wrap me up tightly in your arms while you slip a \$20 bill in my hand. This time I'm not taking anything with me. I turn to leave. I wave goodbye and it is both too much, and just not enough.

The Indicator Indicator Marked Our Intention to Turn on to the A505

Nic Cain

Click-Click We slowly moved ahead;
Acceleration barely noticeable.
I gazed out

Click-Click the window to my left. An old man
stood; his head bowed; a doffed
cloth gap squeezed between

Click-Click gnarled fingers. I strained my neck to watch him
as we passed by, wondering when
he would

Click-Click move on. He vanished as the procession
blocked my view. The black numbers read 50;

Click-Click the redcircle demanded obedience. I
stared over the shoulder of the

Click-Click wispy-haired driver in his ill-fitted black suit.
We weren't going over 30. We

Click-Click wouldn't be going over 30, I was told. I was
not respectful. As

Click-Click the last few houses fell away, the
fields opened up. The sun threw its
rage through the

Click-Click window to burn my face. A reverse arm
pedal lowered the glass letting in crisp

Click-Click January air. My father flashed knitted
brows my way. My cheeks chilled as
the breeze

Click-Click entered the car. My nose puckered
at freshly sprinkled shit on fallow land.
I wheeled

Click-Click the window closed once more. We
proceeded slowly along. The road
stretched ahead. A

Click-Click car flew past in the outside lane and
quickly disappeared into the far distance.

Click-Click...Click-Click...Click-Click...Click-Click

“Oh,” exclaimed our chauffeur, shutting off the torture. Silence fell. Only broken by the soft sobbing of my mother.

Phonebooth at the Sunset

Maya Herbert



Archangel

Tami Jensen

For Gabriel Fernandez, I will never stop saying your name.

You die 37 miles away while I scrape oatmeal from a breakfast bowl.
Your own mama splits you open, brown body a plum rotted all day in the sun,

swollen & tender. Blood clots in the hairline (where a mother's kiss should go)
& she can't wash it away; it gathers under nails, wine-colored

witness to a Bible tale told wrong. I gag on the pages:
a son drowned in his own blood, a mother who does not weep.

Now I bake an extra cake, add a new candle for the birthdays you missed.
This year my own is old enough to blow them out, cheeks like pink balloons.

For a split second, I can see your face behind licks of flame.
My son sucks icing from a spoon & cradles a slice in two tiny fists.

How Trauma Binds to the Nervous System

Marie Marchand

the past cleaves to
your disordered mind
antiquated exhibit on fire
as emotion heaps
onto emotion
perpetual responsorial

deconstruction comes
after time to sit
embracing the shattered
you try to stand

Will this keep happening?
until you forgive yourself

now (always)
in this thought-museum
my brain pours cortisol
onto emotion
until I am unrecognizable
in this cyclic repetition

after discernment
I gather remnants
scattered relics
to begin (again)

this will keep happening
until I forgive myself

Vow of Celibacy

Karla Maravilla

Papa,
you are the red maple tree that fattened its rings
beneath our feet,
roots fused like hair on sinewed legs in the dancing
moon coffee grounds
of Earth.

Papa,
You bred me in the virgin bulbs of milk bell pendants
Drooping my head to lick the dew of the desert valley.
My sister, a pearled Chrysanthemum of
future heartache, your Stardew valley.

Papa,
Twelve times a year you bore me fruit
Of whirliwigs that I would peel,
Of green pods that I would roast,
Of baked samaras that I would boil.

Papa,
That summer the tree rotted,
tunneled with bleached beetle larva and silkened
fall webworms before it could fling helicopters
down our hairy spines that nerved like clockwork.

Papa,
When you grabbed that axe and parted heritage
and struck your machete against our necks,
you left the bitter stump and roots
to cleave to the brambles of your chest.

Papa,
All our trees are plagued with plaque.
Fences knocked and built red on ground.
Our grass grazed by splintered incense
were black cats whisker church angels.

Papa,
In that photo I wore my gold earrings,
gifted when my nursery earrings grew too big for my lobe,
because you said it made me your princess,
but I'm the hot chocolate that grew cold.



Papa,
Mama cries pink carnations into bloom
at the foot of your dresser.
Garibai, Garibai, Garibai, I tell her.
The eagle that eats her heart
Is the lover you don't wish to regret.

Papa,
All my life I feared you
And had begun to believe celibacy
a rule of life, where mother and daughter
become one, immigrants of the fire husbands and fathers
ignite, but I've vowed to the goddess Ostara
my return to happiness, as tears form lily,
it is now my second coming,
for a Taurus, I am patient.

Give me back / *Take away*

Shelby Davis

Give me back
calm nights
of drifting to sleep.
White noise.
Warmth.

*Take away
4 am panics
before 12-hour shifts.
Adrenaline mummies.
Caffeine.*

Give me back
that Teen Titan wallet
filled with a single ten-dollar bill.
Meager going far.
Content.

*Take away
the weekly paychecks
amounting to barely enough.
Large inadequate.
Dread.*

Give me back
the childhood crushes
coming and going.
Late night blushes.
Flirty.

*Take away
the dating standard
I cannot obtain.
Tinder hookups.
Fleeting.*

Give me back
the fantastical worlds
with lives seeming plausible.
Anything is possible.
Dreaming.

*Take away
these destructive thoughts
plaguing my mind.
I am nothing.
Insignificance.*

Me Versus Myself

Savannah Moss



Poor Me

Laura Smith

I don't want this to be another sad poem
we all know I'm depressed
enough metaphors about shadows
and my poor heart
aren't you sick of it?

I don't want to feel this way
I never did
or maybe I did
I'm not unique
look at how sad I am.

I don't want to be a charity case
another welfare child
without a daddy
you're not special
we've all got issues.

I don't want to think about it
and they don't either
I chose to hurt
puny scars on my wrists
they chose the bottle.

I don't want them to feel bad
I used to
but we've changed since then
you're still drinking
I'm not a kid anymore.

I don't want to feel ugly anymore
sometimes I feel eighteen
counting the calories of a green apple
63.2
did I get their attention?

I don't want to feel like
I'm just another obstacle
another problem
better off without me
I'm worth more than that.

I don't want this to be another sad poem
another pity party
for a troubled child
 we've heard it enough
but maybe it should be.

Cat Prayers

Karla Maravilla

This morning, Lola bit down, and she bit down hard but skim past this thought for a moment and let's jump back to early morning when my mom kissed my dad off to work and let the neighbor's cat into the living room.

The neighbor's cat is blue-eyed and white. She is what America looks like in cat form, and she speaks its language too, sassy meows always butting into your sentences demanding for the things she believes she deserves. Because of her American looks and demeanor, I've named her Spam; though I know her owners call her Snowball, another American trope of cat names for white felines, she fits equally well.

She strolls through the doorway as my mother mumbles a prayer, wishing for the return of my father's spirit to this home, whole and intact, cleansed from the bruja that's stolen his heart and who keeps stealing his eyes, ears, and nose. She hopes his mouth isn't next. We do not know what the bruja already sees from his eyes, hears through his ears, smells from his nose. I can only assume the bruja sees the long wrinkles on my mother's face, listens to each crack in her throat when she asks my dad why he came home from work late, smelling the traces of frijoles de la olla that have now gone cold. We all do not want to hear what she will say through his lips, though my mother's prayers bother me.

As my mother recites a psalm from the bible, one she's memorized and tried to have me remember too but failed because I do not see them as psalms, but as spells, another cult ritual like the drinking and eating of the body and blood of Christ or the coating of oiled sage, olive, and rosemary herbs on the creaking wood of a church to ward out demons--my cat Bratwurst lurks in the shadows.

Bratwurst is a wimpy whiskered domestic shorthair, a tuxedo cat, to be precise. Because of Bratwurst's Germanic features, such as her green slit eyes dappled with orange specks propped against the backdrop of her shiny black fur, which is long and wispy at the tips, and her elegant white mitts and white ascot, I named her Bratwurst. It suits her well because her favorite treat is chicken pork sausage.

She lurks, belly low to the ground as she eyes Spam with a quiet curiosity marked by the twitching of her crooked whiskers. Spam and Bratwurst are half-siblings, same mother, different father. Still, they do not like each other, as goes the relationship of half-siblings (I should know, I have one, though he is too young to attribute me to all his problems just yet, but he will, like with our father, which he will learn to do, like water birth). Spam, anxious and choosing to be ignorant of Bratwurst's awkward slinking, rushes to my side and begs for a handful of kibble. I ignore her. Though she is cute, she is not my cat. I try not to feed her when it's my money that buys the cat food every month. I feed enough strays as is. Besides, her owners feed her already. Eventually, she, too, ignores me, choosing to groom her bloated stomach on the brown carpet when

Lola speed walks down the hall to the living room.

Lola is a turtle cat. That means she is a kind of calico but sassy and shy. It also means she was born to be female. Turtle cats hardly ever are born male, and on the rare chance they are, they are infertile, which I see as a good thing. Lola got the wrong end of the tail, and I think she knows it, mostly because she hates all male cats. She can't sit or lay near them without growling and hissing at them to leave her alone, though they don't do anything to her. My mother said she learned without having anyone tell her that women cannot trust men, making her proud of Lola, so we named her Lola, after Nuestra Senora de Los Dolores, Our Lady of Sorrows, the Virgin Mary. If it still hasn't sunk into your head yet, Lola is the embodiment of our sorrows, the virgin we wish we could always be, but men have entered us and thus taken our sense of infinity.

In terms of appearance, she is black with brown patches. Her back right foot is her lucky foot because it is the only fur that is entirely black. I sometimes think about how if she were to die, someone would take the opportunity to cut it off and carry it like a rabbit's foot in their left pocket. A shame since it's her right foot. It deserves to be tucked into the right pocket where it belongs, though realistically, it belongs on her leg buried with the rest of her body intact for the tree burrowing worms in the backyard.

Lola, low to the ground, legs compressed for the pounce, does not wait for what Bratwurst calls "the right moment." She leaps at Spam, clinging to her rear end, slamming into her side a flurry of hits. She has the advantage until my mom yells at her to be nice to guests. My mother separates them and takes Spam outside with a handful of kibble.

When my mother comes back inside, Lola argues with her, chasing her close at the ankles, running in front of her legs to trip her up as she meows at her to restore her pride, to give her justice, to let her go outside and roll in the dirt as she pleases, but my mother hides in her room, Christian music vibrating through the walls as she lays in bed, eyes open and silent, thinking back to simple times like when she was at school in Mexico and saw the two boys escorted by the profesores to the oficina, one boy biting hard on the arm of the other boy, refusing to let go, so whispering students sidestepped them through the halls, my mother one of them, now scared of school wondering if all boys were like that—wondering if all boys ever do is bite.

Lola was pissed. She was chasing her mother up and down the hall, pouncing in the familiar motions of play and exercise. Soon, Lola shifted. Her tail puffed up, and she began to growl, slowly inching towards her mother in the living room. She pounced, clung to her mother's rear end, and bit hard at the base of her tail, refusing to let go as Bratwurst screamed and squirmed, struggling to unhook Lola. I flew from the couch and tried to pull Lola off, but she had

bit down, bit down hard, biting deeper into the roll of Bratwurst's flesh till she thought it wasn't worth it anymore and released. Bratwurst turned and hissed before running to the couch, slinking under to groom her twitching tail.

Lola stood there, tail flicking up and down like a car shift, tongue licking her thin purple lips, which meant she was uncomfortable or unhappy, maybe both. I then noticed the white clumps of fur, three in total, that clung to the carpet. They were from this morning when Lola had hit Spam. Lola, noticing them as well, sniffed and began to lick them up into her mouth, chewing as if they were sweet grass, devouring the evidence. Then she looked up at me, eyes wide and sweet, green like her mothers, but full of intelligence only a chimpanzee could hold as if asking: What happened?

But I tell her, "You bit your mom. You ate Spam's fur. Why's that?"

And she stares at me as if I should have known. As if I knew why boys and cats bite down on each other, refusing to let go till it isn't worth it anymore. The boy must have looked up into the principal's eyes back in Mexico, eyes big and innocent, avoiding the paddle that lays flat on the desk. He says, "I did it cause I wanted to because no one does anything unless they want to, cause they feel like they have to, so I did it, and because of it, I've learned something you haven't, all because I do what I do."

"We do it cause we do," Lola says. "I do as I do."

My Art is Not For

Madelyn McLeod

My art is not for
the whole of “everyone”

It is for myself

I am my judge
I deem and dictate
what I wish to express

or am I?

must I be?

Can't I receive information
and be a simple
receptacle?

I am not contemporary
as everyone wants
me to be

I love the old,

the traditional

things long since used
as teaching materials

Can I not paint
what I love?

But I guess I will do what
I must

in this conundrum
of conformity
I make
what I do not love

Lament of the Killdeer

Caitlin Holland

I am sitting in the pasture cradling the last fledgling of the season. Crows have taken the other two and this one is not long for this world. Death rattles it's chest with every labored breath.

I think:

There is a metaphor here. Something about my death-bringing hands and the vultures that travel with me. I am a harbinger of the end of things cloaked in feathers with blackened fingers. Who could ever want that?

A voice:

You are looking at this all wrong. It is not black that stains your hands but gold.

(The tiny bird breathes, ribs creaking against my palms.)

I think:

And yet, I leave no color smeared behind on the bodies I touch. Nothing but rot and soil to cover them as the universe stakes its claim. Tell me, does the earth take the gold before the black?

A voice:

Just because you do not see the marks you leave does not mean they are not there.

(The beat of tiny wings, soft as silk against my palms.)

I think:

nothing

A voice:

How many have you sat with as they breathed their last? How many have you tried to save? How many have you cried over? Your heart beats so loud within your chest. Did you ever think that perhaps death follows you because you can endure the losses?

(A chirp from tiny lungs, breaking in the middle against my palms.)

I think:

nothing

A voice:

You are where you need to be. Nobody wants to die alone.

I think:

I understand.

(Stillness against my palms.)

Self Care

Savannah Moss



After the Divorce

Tami Jensen

That summer they board up the windows
of home; you say goodbye
to the crooked Joshua trees, blue-bellied lizards,
& the neighbor's golden retriever.
You begin to count the space between ribs.
Your family shifts in pieces across a fault line,
back to the place you were born,
& you grow like a switchblade,
like sugarcane,
like Dad's shadow against the barn door three summers later.
You learn to ride a horse & build small fires in tin cans.
Your hands are stained with betadine,
palms reek of bergamot
& sun-dried saddle soap.
Your favorite horse's tail twitches under a braid.
Beyond the coyotes & oak, water pools in the gutter when it rains.
You anchor yourself in mirage & suck the skin of an orange to your teeth.
You teach your sister
how to fold clumsy paper boats & send them out to sea.

What Every Pastor's Kid Should Know

Kelsey Bursch

Early Sunday mornings, a
moment of relief in waking
before the s
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 g realization.

It's Sunday.

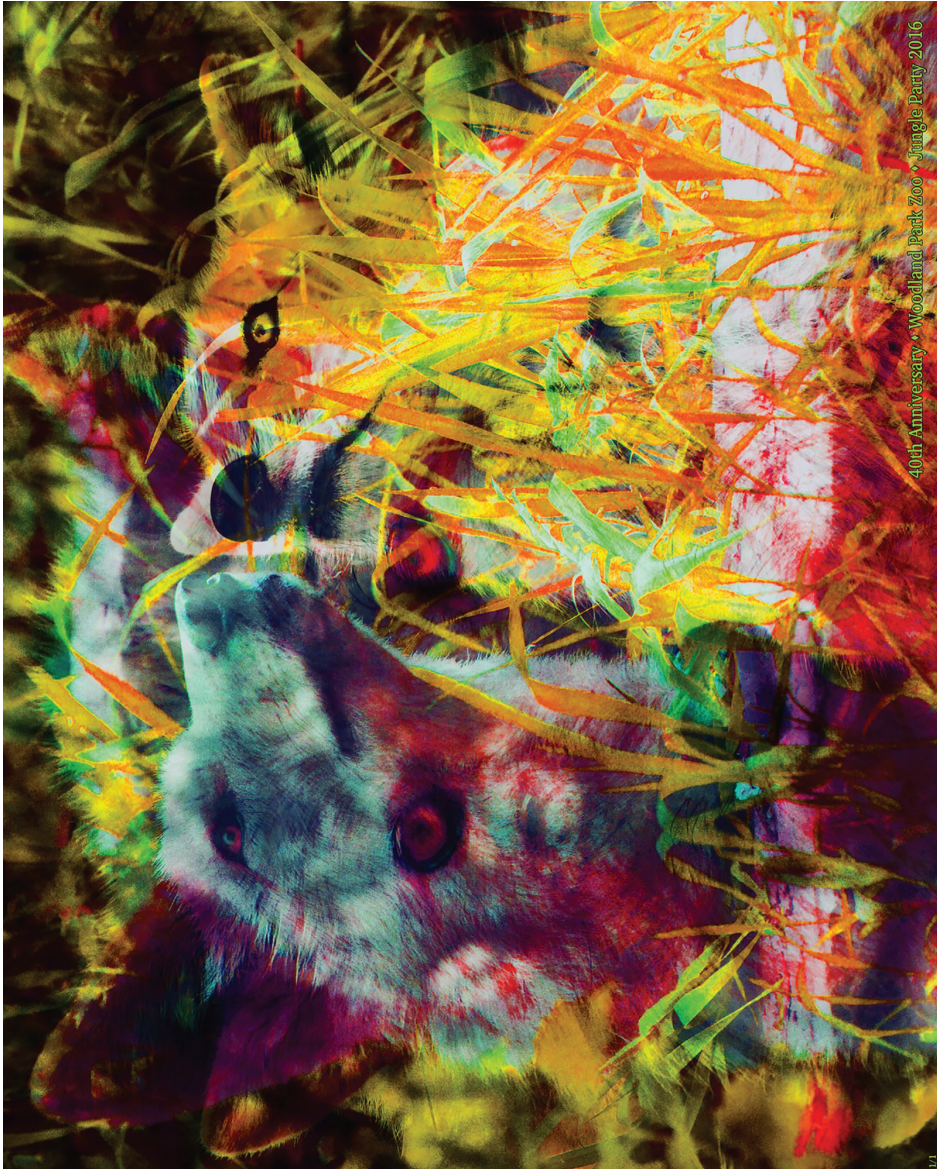
Pangs of hunger and weary eyes
are a sacrifice for punctuality.
You know the congregation by
heart, and they claim the same.

It's the confidentiality of knowing things you
desire to be discussed behind closed doors.
When everything seems to be
going right, the ringing of the phone
saps the energy out of the room.
The hard work and dedication of yard sales,
events, and taking care of others without help.
Days off meant going to the church and
helping out in any way possible.

Every day is a Sunday.

WOLV3S

Loren Palmer



Heirloom

Karla Maravilla

My husband and I are in the car, engine running in the rain as we contemplate what our life will become once we enter his parents' home and take that *thing* into ours. No more hockey games, late-night visits to the bar, sticky popsicles on the porch. That *thing* will dictate what we will do for the rest of our lives.

"My father is dead." I am disappointed to say that it was not these words that stabbed me, but what my husband said next: "It's time for me to pick it up."

My mother-in-law tells me through the rolled down car window that with time, we will learn to love it as she did, but what she forgets to mention is the paralysis, nausea, and early age blindness that comes with caring for an angry ancient spirit. In reality, she knows but will not say. She is secretly glad, I can tell. It won't be hers to look after anymore. It will be mine.

"It takes many forms," my husband tells me. "We do not know what it will become."

Once we step through that door, it appears. The golden lab given to my husband's father as a young boy. The one that never died no matter how many times he shot him in the head. The one that would always appear in the yard no matter how many times he left it for dead out in the middle of the road miles and miles from home.

One moment it was a shiny golden lab, the next a ferret, its nose pink and stripes a deep brown. Then it was a parrot, feathers red and voluptuous against its sleek black beak. Finally, it took the form of an agile cat with wimpy whiskers, a white stomach, and a black coat. A tuxedo cat, a domestic shorthair. It walked into the dog carrier, long-tail flicking the door shut behind it.

My mother-in-law, draping us in rosaries, sent us on our way.

The thing will not eat from a bowl. It will only eat food on the floor, paws prodding at the large chunks of meat I would buy for it at the grocery store. No one will believe that I am a vegan anymore.

The thing will not drink water from its bowl, either. It will only drink from our cups or the faucet. Sometimes I catch it drinking from the toilet after one of us has gone. Nothing else pleases it more.

At night it scratches at our door for hours demanding to be let in, but this is the one boundary we have set up that we refuse to break. We will not let it haunt us at night.

Eventually, life gained a sense of normalcy. The *thing* began to nap throughout the day and would stick to itself at night, scratching our living room chairs' arms and ripping holes in the curtains, only setting small fires in the kitchen sink.

It left us entirely alone, but one night, when my husband had to work the night shift, the air in the room got cold. I began to see the wisps of my breath like snowflakes, my chest heavy with an invisible weight. Eventually, I fell asleep,

but I dreamt of horrible dreams of when I was a little girl. I was in my church's morning classes crying because I did not understand where my parents had gone. No matter how many times I checked the pews, they were never there, and anyone I would ask for help would turn their heads toward the pastor, the only man whose voice echoed throughout the walls.

Everyone stood, lining up in the aisles towards the pastor. I got lost in the crowd, pulled to the front against my will, eyes blurry with tears, and there on the table were my parents. My father's blood was being poured into the golden chalice, and my mother's skin peeled and placed into the mouths of those inline—the body and blood of Christ.

Flying awake, I knew it was here in the room with me.

“Where are you? Come out!”

Slowly, it placed its left paw on my cheek. It was sitting on my chest, and its eyes were human, not the slits of an innocent cat. It asked me what was wrong, but I could not speak, I could not see, the world went dark as it filled my head with images of blood and meat and cold water pouring over my flesh.

It pressed my body against the headboard of the bed and sunk its claws into my cheeks, yowling its breath into my nose before pushing its triangle head past my jaw, mouth biting my uvula. Images, now, so static, my mind unfurled like new year ribbons trumpeted with gunfire on the sandy kitchen floor, silent at 12:01.

By morning, I was scrunched in bed, and no matter how many times my husband smoothed my face with his hands, I saw its eyes, so human, I could hardly believe they were real as it sat there on the ground, grooming its balls, flattening the fur with wet streaks.

Bear Paw Necklace

Jamie Wyatt

the curtains
 billow and pulse with the night air
as if breathing
sweat beads,
 sliding
 creating a cool pool
 at the small of my back
danger dissipates
 with the extinguished dream
the only necklace I remember you gifting me
was fashioned by your bear paw hands.

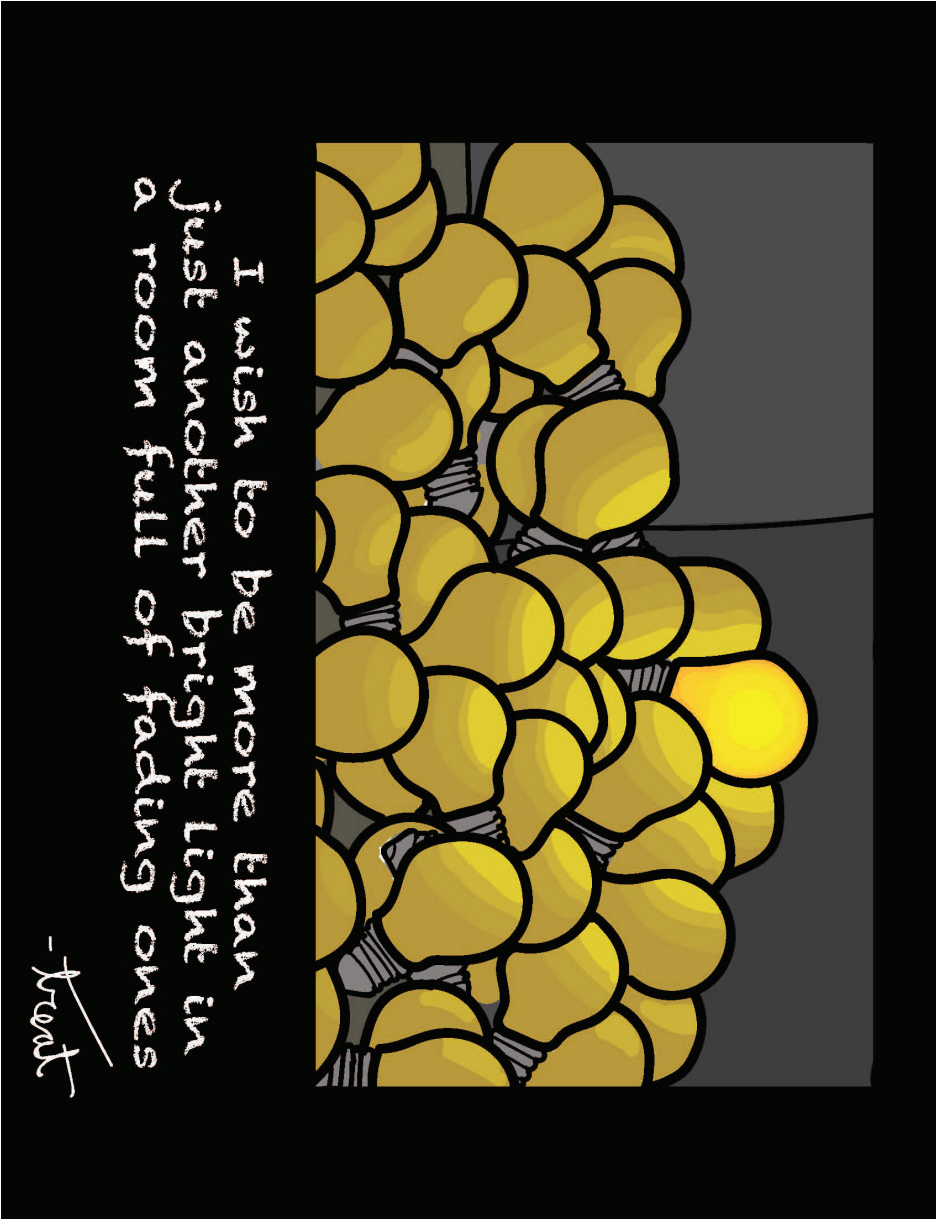
| Orizuru |

Lynn Magill

| I |
| folded |
my pain		into words	
artful	clean		symbolic
structured		patterns	
and then		I stood them up	
displayed them		and set them	
free	by		
their	long		
tails			
renzuru			

Lightbulb

Morgan Treat



Nana

Paula Williamson

The 18th amendment Prohibition
Race riots in
Charleston Omaha Chicago
Black men lynched for having the audacity to live
While white women received the right to vote
Growing fears of communism coming to our shores
The year after the Great War ravaged the world
And a plague killed millions
1919 makes 2020 seem tame

She turned 100 last year
A little brown girl born
In a teeny town in Georgia
The first girl after so many boys
 My first real friend
Told me stories while teaching me
to season chicken and sift flour
How to sew dresses for my dolls
I read her chapters from the bible before bed
Since she quit school at twelve
But I assure you some things you don't learn in school
 Cocoa skin
Hands calloused from the hard work
Of raising a daughter all on her own
Growing tomatoes, string beans, and turnip greens
Bathing white babies and cleaning their parent's floors
Hands always there to sweep up the pieces

She turned 100 last year
First-year living in a nursing home
Her tiny but mighty body
Healthful, robust
Years of clean living
No booze, cigarettes or red meat
 If only it had preserved her mind
She no longer knows me
 Didn't notice when her only daughter died
She spends her days pretending to care for imaginary babies
And staring at calloused hands that spent a lifetime serving others

Memory

Marisa Villanueva

El diablo, fire eyes morning and night
angelic baby eyes pressed shut
I sweep

Windows, fist-hit, neighbors, same
decorations, you are not special-
limbs mixed with ropes, black holes, and reels

Unexpected, faded purple-
what will I take? Not the rubies-
not the gold, the diamonds, the china

Not the pesos, the porcelain bank
ropes entangle gold locket, quicksand the key
translucent hands throttle gears back and forth

Back and forth, right to left, dawn to noon
air smothered, rushed, into a lamp
stuffed inside the capsuled air

The ropes, your movie reels, broken glass
Clouded and washed-up clock
slur your speech

Cocked head kisses shoulder
Eyes meet a wooden iris
Who is that woman next to you?

Fire racing to the bomb
mouse caught in the trap
search for Waldo

Words plastered in the air
teeth and hands clapped for someone
that wooden iris. Who is that?

Ropes, white cotton spindled
smudgy, patchy, dried gear grease
Cuyandera can't put a scent to this one, no cure, no healing

Ropes choking words from the elite doctor
eat more turmeric, it helps, for a millisecond
take the blanket off your home

Runner with baton when you glimpse the light
Blind spot when your children ask what their name is
Eraser when your wife pleads with the wooden iris

Straight jacket when your grandchildren eye you
a lifeless squirrel reaching for air
in the middle of the street

Paparazzi to privacy
“I am your daughter”
Mentirosa!

Tornado to cellars
“I am your son”
Mentiroso!

Burglar to warmth
“It’s me. I am your wife. We’ve been married for 60 years.”
Mentirosa!

Chained to cottoned sheets
limbs meatless
taste, color, faded

Salivating dog, key thrown away
pointed spindle, sleeping, the wheel
emptiness

Meet your 48-year-old son
Your 40-year-old daughter
Tuesday.

Hour later, hear that damn tune?
defibrillators for your cinema reels
No. Friday.

Music is the red skull bottle to me
but I, the skull bottle to you
I, the black cape

Paparazzi. Tornado. Burglar.
last fuse in the box
ready to burst that bulb

Tuesday.

Dream Reality Confusion

Savannah Moss



The Dead of Night

Aubrey Higdon

I woke up in the dead of night.
No gradual return to consciousness,
only open eyes,
an unblocked awareness
of everything:
quiet noises so loud
I heard them
in the bones of my chest,
felt them
in the hollow tunnels of my ears.
For a long moment
I watched all the colors of the darkness
as the thumping of my heart pulsated my ribs
and rebounded in my skull
immaterially.
I sensed all the obstructions, of the walls and furniture around my room,
I felt us coexist amid our stillness.
I was audience to the creaking of the walls,
the groaning of the pipes,
the heaviness of empty air.
It was then,
within my partial existence
that I wondered
if anything was meant
to be breathing.

Reflecting

Quentin Ragan

Reflecting

Yesterday I fell off what I call my noble steed and today the tulips in the window are wide open; bulbs grow from just water everything comes with its set of punishments. Going to bed cold, shaky, shock maybe, and dreamed spray paint on weathered concrete read, "SYLVIA, SYLVIA." "As in Plath?" "Not everything is poetry," my eyes looked down, beat.

Motorized Horse

Romance of the cherry red motorcycle, but mine is grey. VISCERAL, JAUNTING, THUMPING, I was thinking, "Motorcycle Bodhisattva" when I was North bound to Naneum with the warm sun, Dharma scripture, and Postmodern poetry anthology. I paint myself this way for my own satisfaction, trying to force freedom I just can't feel into an eclectic esthetic. Looking for mutual understanding, I looked up motorcycle quotes and found one that said, "Don't twist the throttle with your ego." Everything comes with its set of punishments.

Midwinter Sun

Is rare here. Lowering my eyes to the speedometer for too long, I took advantage of the sun. Inattentiveness will bring fault to the heart, paint the road as a winding serpent, and a rider its unfavorable guest. After calling Anna, she says, "You're just a boy still getting hurt on bikes, but the bikes are just bigger now." The bike still my noble steed and we both assailants, sacrificing oneself and centrifugal force will bloody your knees, i.e., genuflecting to the reciprocity of the January sun. And now, since I can't make the river before sundown, I hope from the sun that it will be patient, that it'll wait for me despite, in Calcutta, Kathmandu.

Heedful Alchemy

I bought a six pack of some craft peanut butter beer and it was just missing the jelly. Sharing them with Allie, having to call the dog from jumping on my aching body, we talked about the immediacy of pursuing things our soul is drawn too over relationships, the thing that will make you content when it is time for your coin to be flipped over to the other side, and wishing the same for your partner. I went home and watched a documentary about Carl Jung, intrigued by the idea as using myth as a medium, a resonator, a strummer of heart chords. But what can we really get out of myth and these little stories? Well, stars burn up light years away and we don't see the solar celebration; one is only left with their dreams.

Ephemeral Passage

Unusual bodies will begin to bruise if not used and are bruised if they are. Grass grows closer to the white moon and dies come snowfall. A rat gathers all the relics, and they are stolen or break. Fire will burn, but not if smothered. Eyes

see open space but are windows of the front wall. Tropical water will freeze in Antarctica. Not too far out of town I found myself in the grass that is growing closer to the moon, after freezing on the controls of my rat relic, revving the incinerating engine, bruised, hissing through my teeth after my eyes losing sight for just one moment. Everything comes with its set of punishments.

Big Lab Symphony

Zach Schloss

Swish and whoosh,
percolator splashes like the spinning
towels in the laundry room.
Wood wick candle
snaps,
pops,
whines,
as finished coffee glugs into craft.
A hoarse note from black lab at window,
muffled by glass panes.
His bass vocal fry like pizzicato,
plucked strings,
but a whisper.
It crescendos
into a falsetto
dog wail.
Howl breaks
into staccato.
“OH! OH! OH!” he cries.
I sip chai.
Swish heat
against cheek.
Clack keyboard
by candle sputter.
“OH! OH! OH!”
I guffaw into hollow
coffee mug chamber.
His screams
decrecendo
into the trembling blow
of a middle school oboe.
I puff at the candle until it’s quiet.

From the Flight of Birds

Marie Marchand

For Amanda Gorman

young people speak tongues
of sweetness and fire
truth scraping dry ground
streams begin to flow higher

this foreign sound
trumpets blaring doom away
as mystics and prophets say

she signals, Wait!

we can revive and restore humanity
overcome and transmute hate

hopelight fills the lungscape
and like winter birds
iridescent words escape

through the imagery of poetry
we see
a different outcome—
who it is we can be

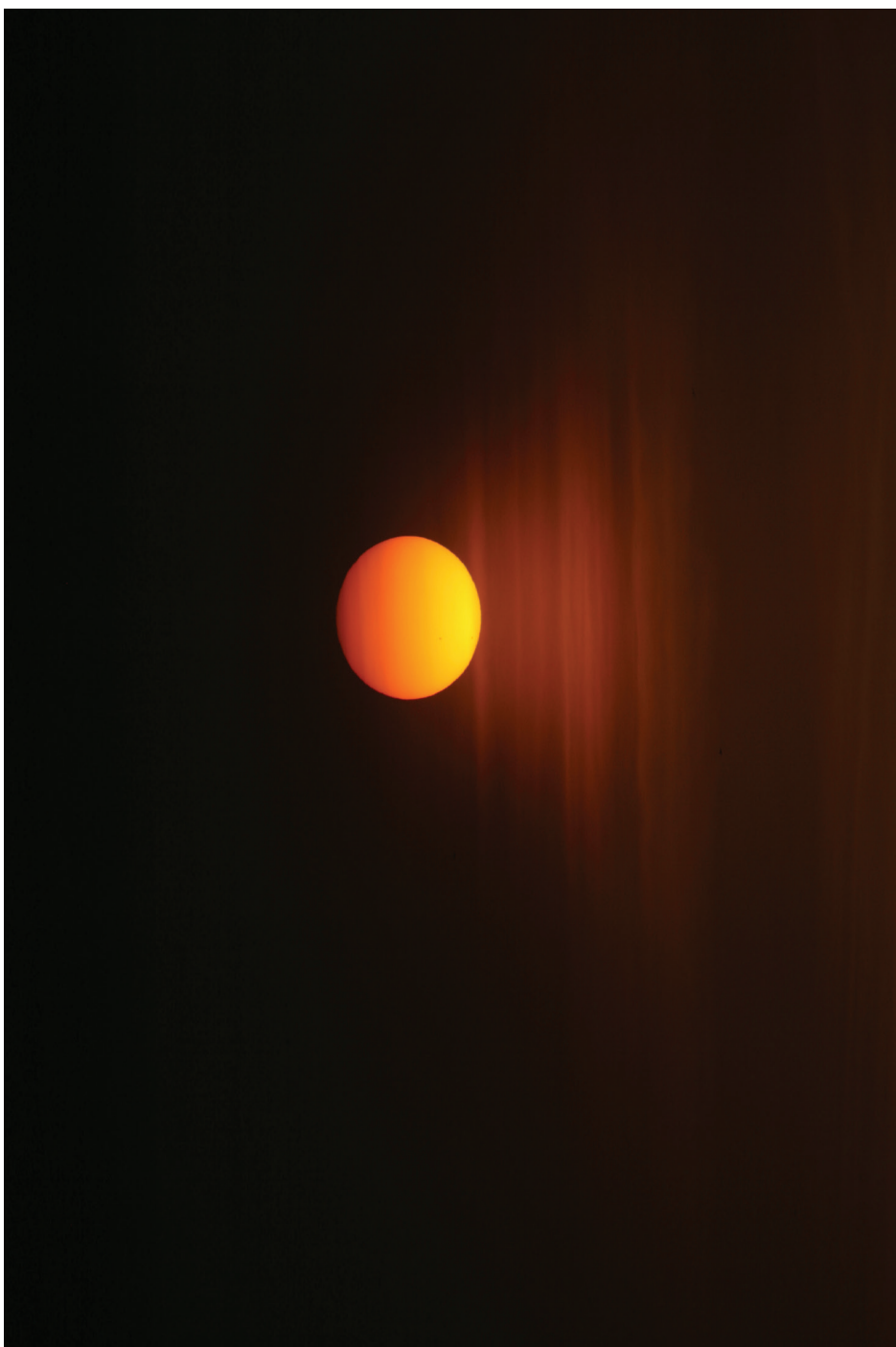
thank yous to tomorrow's
truthspoken rainbow gifts
in brightbrazen capacity
for this occasion

fire is the path to create our fate
love is the gate

Love is the gate.

Sunset over the Caribbean

Maya Herbert



Featured Author

Marissa Villanueva

Manatash: How does your poem exhibit your truth?

Marisa Villanueva: A lot of individuals in the Latinx community face oppression on a day-to-day basis. This can be seen in schools, jobs, or places like grocery stores. I can recall being told not to wear colors because my skin was too dark. I can recall being told I was white because my skin was too light. This poem exhibits my truth through the slurs that are in it. I've been called some of these names, as have my family and friends. The kids that are mentioned in this poem are a truth of mistreatment. Although I have not experienced this depth of mistreatment, we deserve to give others a voice when their voice is taken and stripped from them. This poem exhibits personal and racial truth.

M: How has your culture and community influenced your work?

MV: I've been able to hear the stories of my grandparents and ancestors crossing borders for a better life. I've been able to hear the stories of mistreatment but also the stories of strangers lending a helping hand to immigrants who know minimal to no English. I have had the opportunity to learn of my family's history through the community I've been placed in. I am fortunate to have the things I do because of the sacrifices of those that came before me.

M: How did you come across the craft of this poem?

MV: I've read poetry for some time now, and I have written a variety of poems and fictional works here and there. The professors at CWU really pushed me to reach outside of the norm, what has already been done, and get out of the box that a lot of other people allowed me to stay in. The craft of this poem is a mixture of reading literature during my free time, getting inspiration from the professors I've been able to take classes with these past two quarters, and the flow I wanted this poem to exuberate.

M: What makes 'De La Tierra' powerful is the use of pejoratives, or slurs, that galvanize the poem, which directs me to think of your experiences as a poet from the Latinx community. What was an early experience that taught you language has power?

MV: I am a proud Latina. One early experience where I learned that language has power was in 6th grade, around 2006. During this time, I remember a lot of walkouts happening for the Latinx community. At my school, I recall a lot of students—including myself—talking about when to walkout. We had people of all colors participate. One thing I remember is a sign that read, "brown and proud". A lot of students were sent home for walking out or attempting to do so.

Signs were told to be thrown away and detention slips were given. I remember one student filled with anger and hurt standing up and asking the principal, “It’s because I’m brown isn’t it?”. The principal had told us it had nothing to do with our color, but the majority of students in that room were of Latin decent.

From this incident, I was able to learn that words, written or spoken, can lead to action and questioning. After this walkout took place, I haven’t ever forgotten how words allowed us to embrace our Latinx community roots, give it an amplified voice, and raise awareness to situations, laws, and more that impacted our community.

Contributor Biographies

Kelsey Bursch

Kelsey Bursch's passion for writing originated with her stories she wrote in grade school. She has grown up in church and is a devoted follower of Jesus. She currently resides in the Tri-Cities with her family and her two dogs.

Nic Cain

Nicholas Cain is a poet born in the UK who arrived in the PNW a decade ago. Nicholas's poetry blends his personal and cultural experiences with an outpouring of honesty. He is working on an undergraduate degree in Professional and Creative Writing.

Theresa Daigle

Theresa Daigle comes to CWU from Kent State University. She is a student in the Professional and Creative Writing program. She prefers writing about the moody, rainy winter days of Seattle over the freezing cold blizzards of Ohio.

Shelby Davis

Shelby Davis is an English Language and Literature major with a minor in Creative Writing. As an inspired writer, she hopes to become a published author in the near future with her in-progress young adult fiction novels. She is going to attend graduate school for her Creative Writing Master's. Shelby can be seen adventuring the great outdoors or through novels/binge-watching, and she enjoys spending her time writing as soon as an idea sparks.

B. Bilby Garton

B. Bilby Garton is a senior in the Professional and Creative Writing program Brevity, Cleaver, Bending Genres, and Feed. She was recently nominated for Best Small Fictions 2020.

Bryce Grant

Bryce Grant grew up in southern California, in a conservative home. His writing revolves around discomfort, hurt, and fear, which he feels are cornerstones of the human experience.

Aubrey Higdon

Aubrey Higdon is a junior in the Professional and Creative Writing major at CWU who is pursuing a career in writing and editing poetry. Her work has appeared in Manastash 2019 and 2020 and Washington's Best Emerging Poets 2019. She hopes that, through poetry and art, we can restore empathy to a struggling world.

Caitlin Holland

Caitlin Holland is a non-binary poet from the California Bay Area. They are in the Professional and Creative Writing program at CWU.

Tami Jensen

Tami Jensen is a queer writer studying Creative and Professional Writing at CWU. A poet by passion, she also dabbles in short stories and creative nonfiction. In her spare time she enjoys spending time with her wife, their two-year-old, and their polydactyl cat, Stella.

Aster Knudson

Aster Knudson is in their second year of a double major in Theatre Arts and Art & Design at CWU. When they're not drawing, acting, or directing, they enjoy cooking, playing tabletop roleplaying games, and writing songs with friends.

Jay L. R.

Jay L. R. was born and raised in Washington state. They moved around, living in 23 different homes and apartments by the age of 20. In Fall of 2022, Jay will receive their Bachelors in English Literature & Language with a minor in Creative Writing. They are currently residing in Ellensburg with their spouse and cat. They work as a writing tutor and a McNair Research Scholar at CWU.

Emily Lyon

Emily Lyon is a student from Central Yakima Valley, earning her bachelor's degree in writing and Deaf studies. This is the first publication of her poetry and artwork.

Lynn Magill

Lynn Magill lives in Western Washington and has deep Iowa roots that influence many aspects of her writing and art. She is graduating from CWU in Winter 2021 with a Masters Degree in Professional and Creative Writing and will then begin her doctorate at Northcentral University.

Timory Malone

Timory prefers to write short stories and poetry because her commitment issues make anything longer seem like it's just too needy. Her hobbies include eating cheese and sleeping nine hours a night. She resides in Everett WA, with her well-behaved husband, and poorly cared for house plants.

Karla Maravilla

Karla Yaritza Maravilla is a senior at CWU, majoring in the Professional and Creative Writing program. She resides in Granger, WA, with her two cats, Bratwurst and Lola. She plans to graduate Spring 2022 with a Professional Writing Certificate. In the meantime, she will read Natalie Diaz and Gloria Anzaldúa in her fluffy cat socks.

Marie Marchand

Marie Marchand has published in the Paterson Literary Review, Tiny Seed Journal, High Plains Register, and numerous chapbooks. Her poetry was recognized by the Allen Ginsberg Poetry Awards and Wyoming Writers. "Pink Sunset Luminaries" was published in 2018. She's been featured in The Writing Cooperative and Storymaker.

Madelyn McLeod

Madelyn McLeod is a student at CWU.

Savannah Moss

Savannah Oliver Moss is a second-year studio fine arts student at CWU who uses their work to unpack and affirm their trauma.

Loren Palmer

Loren Thomas Palmer is a senior at CWU and will be graduating in the fall with a degree in Professional and Creative Writing with a minor in Anthropology.

Maya Herbert

Maya Herbert is a student at CWU.

Caitlyn Pregana

Caitlyn Pregana is an English major at CWU. After discovering a passion for poetry at CWU, she began using poetry to outwardly express herself and significant moments in her life. Caitlyn is excited to have her work published and cannot wait to see where the literary journey leads her.

Rebekah Pusateri

Rebekah Pusateri lives in Washington. She received her BA from Western Washington University and is currently getting her MA from CWU. She worked as a travel writer for Academics in Asia and has published stories in The Mercenary and Manastash. Rebekah focuses on teaching English and learning languages.

Quentin Ragan

Quentin Ragan makes it known that his home state is Nevada, being deprived of clouds, moved to Ellensburg to become a commercial pilot, to get nearer the white puffs.

Champagne Ryder

Champagne Ryder is a poet from Seattle, Washington and is a member of Rain City Slam. Champagne deals with depression, grief and various emotions through poetry. Champagne's Favorite Ice cream is Lactaid Cookies and Cream.

Zach Schloss

Zachary Schloss is a junior at CWU majoring in Professional and Creative Writing. He lives in Grandview, WA, with his black lab, Ace, and other farm animals. He plans to graduate in Fall 2022 and pursue an MFA program. For now, he'll dig into Tenth of December: Stories by George Sanders.

Autumn Smith

Autumn Smith is an English major at CWU slowly working towards her Professional and Creative Writing BA. She enjoys studying English and writing creatively. Her work is inspired by her work on her small farm, which boasts horses, chickens, and reptiles.

Laura Smith

Laura is a CWU senior graduating in June of this year. She has been writing both poetry and prose since she was a kid and loves to share work that people can relate to.

Sophia Smith

Sophia Smith is a Douglas Honors College student studying Professional and Creative Writing, and Art and Design. She has been featured in First Friday Artwalk, Manastash Literary Journal, and is currently exhibiting at Gallery One's Kittitas County Open Show. She also hoards bird photos and creates languages in her spare time.

Courtney Tipton

Courtney Tipton is a senior at CWU. She is majoring in Spanish with a minor in Latin American Studies and Creative Writing. She currently lives on Kauai and works on an organic aquaponic produce farm. In her free time she enjoys being outdoors and writing.

Morgan Treat

Morgan Treat is a junior at CWU majoring in Graphic Design with hopes of a future career as a graphic-designer, illustrator and multimedia artist. She want to make things that are not only meaningful but also that promote solutions to real issues of our time.

Marisa Villanueva

Marisa Villanueva is from Texas and will graduate CWU this winter. She has worked in the mental health field, and now pursues writing. Her time providing therapy has allowed her to create an unpublished chapbook, opening the discussion about mental health stigmas. She continues to pursue open discussions through her writing.

Elaina Watts

Elaina Watts is a writer and musician originally from the Seattle area. She has been writing novels for over ten years and will be graduating with a degree in Professional and Creative Writing from CWU in 2021. Elaina's latest creative project is making original music under the name of Xetera.

Caelyn White

Caelyn White is a Sophomore majoring in both Creative Writing and Theater Arts. Primarily a playwright, two of her plays have been produced by Central Theater Ensemble. Besides writing, Caelyn has a deep love for Taylor Swift, Dungeons and Dragons, and her friends. She has also, finally, cut her hair.

Paula Williamson

Paula Williamson is a Black, queer poet from Pittsburgh, PA that has spent the last 17 years in the Bay Area. She is currently an undergraduate student at CWU.

Jamie Wyatt

Jamie Wyatt is a queer poet, born in Anaheim, who has spent the last 25 years living in the Pacific Northwest. She is currently finishing her B.A. in professional and creative writing at CWU. Where she studies with mentor-poets and professors Taneum Bambrick and Maya Jewell Zeller.

MANASTASH CONTRIBUTORS 2021

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Theresa Daigle
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B. Bilby Garton
Bryce Grant
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Aster Knudson
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